

Ministry in Contemporary Rural America --  
The Christian Message and Land Use: Contextual Evangelism

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## ABSTRACT

Many forces which may eventually spell the destruction of contemporary rural America are not being addressed adequately by the Church. Among these forces are issues of land use, America's pursuit of energy independence, land ownership, ecology, farming practices, and rising population. Some of the unique problems include soil erosion, various other forms of land destruction, and political, economical and social infringement upon town and farm people's "just" rights and responsibilities. Problems not so unique to rural America include those surrounding people's longing for salvation from current policies which tend to destroy their lives.

The thesis is, therefore, "since public policy reflects public mood, responsible public rural policy may be achieved when the church, among other institutions, does its job in influencing public mood on all levels."

This dissertation deals with Biblical and ethical resources for the church to draw upon in its effort to call rural people to salvation in Jesus Christ while addressing that salvation to rural people's very real needs in the context of land use policy issues. Hence; contextual evangelism.

Biblical and theological issues of stewardship, community and salvation are addressed primarily from Old Testament perspectives. Ethical resources include those of

the Old and New Testaments and chiefly those of Harvard ethicist, John Rawls, and Dan Rhoades of the School of Theology at Claremont.

The results of this research and evaluation are the proposal of particular guidelines to be considered in the formulation of just policy in regards to farm and food issues. Also, a strategy for ministry in rural America based on evangelism and stewardship is proposed.

The appendix includes an original sermon which expresses how one may preach this issue.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. The Problem:

Growing up in rural Eastern Washington I was very near to agriculture and its related industries. Agriculture, though it deals with land and crops, is really people. It is families at work providing food for a nation, spraying apple orchards, hoeing sugar beets, and combining golden wheat fields. I remember that work on the farm was not always easy and enjoyable, but in so many ways it provided a wholesome life. When harvest approached the entire community pitched in. Youth earned needed money by working in the fields. Small businesses provided food and clothing to keep the people comfortable. School teachers served as "field bosses" over crews of "vacationing" students. Agriculture is a community effort with people as the subject and food and land as the object of all concerned. Due to numerous forces, however, this wholesome situation rapidly nears extinction.

Today increasing evidence convinces me that agriculture is becoming an industry for profit only, rather than for food and community. For many large corporations agriculture is a safe investment enjoying various USDA subsidies and tax deductions.<sup>1</sup> Huge corporations, in many ways,

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<sup>1</sup>Council on Environmental Quality, The Sixth Annual Report (Washington: 1975), Government Printing Office, p. 163.

control many facets of the industry from production to marketing, often edging the local "small" farmer out of business. With the world food crisis demanding The United States' attention. The United States Department of Agriculture has adopted what appears to be an "all systems go" policy leading to mass production and higher prices with the highest returns often being reaped by the large wealthy and powerful agribusinesses.<sup>2</sup> No longer is agriculture primarily a concern of community for itself and for food. Now agriculture is a chief concern of our business and government leaders who tend to view food primarily as an industrial commodity for profit and power. Hence, contemporary rural America's future is in question. Its people and farm families have few places to turn. Many youth flee to the cities and to excessive drinking. With the average age of the farmer in the United States now standing at fifty-four years<sup>3</sup> these farmers will soon grow old and die as may their farms and communities with them. With an excess of 1.25 million acres of land being taken from the soil bank and put into production<sup>4</sup> there are conversely fewer farm units than before. Outside forces,<sup>5</sup> in the cities and in the nation's

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>4</sup>Council on Environmental Quality, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup>Campaign for Human Development, p. 146.

capital apparently are calling the shots, establishing prices, increasing the costs, and making the profits.

This "all systems go" approach by an increasingly wealthy minority has severed contact with the nature of agriculture and of the land and its people. With land pulled from the soil bank and put back under plow America now has dust in the atmosphere over Kansas approaching levels of the dust bowl in the 1930's.<sup>6</sup> "Wind erosion has damaged more than 4.5 million acres of land in the drought-parched Great Plains area since last fall, nearly double the damage inflicted last season and the most in nearly two decades."<sup>7</sup> A four year report by the Bureau of Reclamation, released in 1974, and reported by K. Ross Toole, stated that due to excessive irrigation "there was serious erosion of 155,000 square miles, or almost 15 per cent of the entire area of the western states, and there was more moderate erosion on 330,000 square miles."<sup>8</sup>

Adding to agriculture's woes is coal's stripmining practice in the Northern Great Plains, particularly in the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming. An irretrievably destroyed

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>7</sup>"Wind Erosion Damages Great Plains Acreage," Los Angles Times, (March 6, 1976), Part 1, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>K. Ross Toole, The Rape of the Great Plains (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), p. 175.

water-table coupled with vast amounts of water necessary to cool proposed power plants may ruin the fragile eco-balance already barely surviving in the region.<sup>9</sup> Much of this is because the U.S. is trying to become energy self-sufficient as a nation, relying on western coal and petroleum as the primary source of that energy. And yet, although petroleum is at a premium, agriculture as conducted today remains highly energy inefficient. Chemicals, sprays, and fertilizers as well as gas-guzzling farm machinery reveal an agriculture industry with little regard for increasing shortages of fossil fuels:

About 90% of all nitrogen fertilizers in the U.S. are made from natural gas as an ingredient. It provides the hydrogen in ammonia ( $\text{NH}_3$ ), and the energy to make it. In turn, ammonia is the prime building block for making other kinds of nitrogen fertilizers.

We use over 9 million tons of actual nitrogen a year in our petro-based mode of farming. Making it takes over 360 billion cubic feet of natural gas, enough to heat over 1 million homes.

About 90% of all pesticides are made from petroleum or other petrochemicals. Then more is used as dilutents and in applications to crops. This petro-based kind of pest control requires at least 735 million gallons of petroleum a year.

However, the supplies of gas and oil obtainable at low mid-century costs are getting short. They will get shorter...and the costs are going up. Natural gas for making nitrogen fertilizers rose from 15 cents to 80 cents per 1,000 cubic feet during 1971-1976, a 500% increase, and will rise further to about \$2.00 per 1,000 cubic feet by 1980. Step-by-step, petroleum will rise in a similar trend.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 160ff.

<sup>10</sup>"The U.S. Farm Energy Problem," (September 1976),  
37.

I believe this fossil fuel based system of agriculture may be doomed for failure.

Today America has minimal responsible national policies to deal with these problems of the contemporary rural scene. The only "policy" which abounds is minimal responsible policy at all: Numerous politicians have been making decisions often based on big business interests rather than on small farm, town, family and land concerns.

Finally, as I view this problem from a Christian perspective, I ask, "What is the Church doing about this destruction of land and of people?" I fear my answer reveals that the church largely is unprepared to deal with the issue, and it is a spiritual issue as well as a political issue. The Church has no lobby. The Church has no policy statement and no way to implement it. Many Christians do not understand the Biblical, theological, and ethical foundations for such concern. Christian ministers are seldom trained in political methods or agricultural concerns. Yet as the Church rallied to protest the Viet Nam War, to provide draft counseling centers and letter-writing campaigns and to support "peace" candidates so I believe we can grow to learn and change growing atrocities on the agricultural front. As the Church now stands, it is losing the war against the destruction of rural America because it is largely unprepared to fight the political, economic and spiritual battles.

B. The Importance of the Problem:

Because of the world food crisis, the "all systems go for profit" USDA agriculture policy, the energy shortage and innumerable inter-related problems, American rural society appears to be rapidly disintegrating. With financial gains increasingly being returned to the city-based agribusiness "middle-man"<sup>11</sup> rural poverty increases. As more and more corporations buy up land, an increasing number of small farms are going out of business.<sup>12</sup> With poverty and loss of financial stability, farm families and rural people have lost their roots resulting in rural America's experiencing the many social maladies already cutting into the urban framework,<sup>13</sup> including suicide, drugs, divorce, apathy, and an overall sense of "life is not worth living, here, anyway, if at all."

While people seem to be betrayed by their government and economic structures, the eco-balance is feeling its share of the problem. It, too, may be destroyed. While coal miners tear out "over-burden" to get their precious coal, their efforts at reclamation are senseless. They have destroyed the water-table beyond restoration. Nothing they

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<sup>11</sup>Campaign for Human Development, p. 145.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 145ff.

<sup>13</sup>Toole, p. 96.

can do will replace the geological structures the way that God had previously provided in nature for sub-terranean water storage.

Furthermore, America's current energy-intensive farming (utilizing high concentrations of petroleum and petroleum products) causes pollution and robs society of valuable oil. Already America has a ban on DDT, but numerous other chemicals are also reaching harmful concentrations in the environment. In the summer of 1976, Southern California communities, including and immediately surrounding the town of Azusa, warned their water-drinking constituents against excessive intakes of water, especially among children, due to high nitrate concentrations resulting from fertilizers used in long-abandoned orange groves which once covered the area.<sup>14</sup>

These social and ecological circumstances may add significantly to continual rural deterioration, eventually affecting not only rural America, but the entire nation, world, and future generations as long as national policy does not adequately curb these problems which I will term "land use problems".

Don Parlburg, recently Chief Economist, of the USDA, says that policy comes from vested interests under the pres-

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<sup>14</sup> KNBC Television, News Report, Los Angeles, August 1976.

ent system.<sup>15</sup> As long as vested interests such as the huge grain, food, and energy companies create public policy out of a profit orientation only, America will grow closer to destruction.

Currently, the Church is largely inept in dealing with the breadth, depth, subtleties, and political nature of this whole issue. As the Church deals with people in rural America it must address itself to their real life concerns, or it speaks nonsense. As I understand the situation, rural Christian have no method for constructively dealing with these systemic problems. Don Parlburg has said in effect that unless the Church or some other socially interested institution comes up with a holistic food and farm policy there is little chance for change from the present policy.<sup>16</sup> As a part of my thesis I will show how the church may go about addressing policy formulation and reaching people with Christ's salvation message at the same time.

#### C. The Thesis:

Since public policy reflects public mood,<sup>17</sup> respon-

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<sup>15</sup> Don Parlburg. Statement made at a meeting on agricultural policy, Washington, April 1976, and reported by C. Dean Freudenberger.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Earl Butz. Undated statement reported to me by C. Dean Freudenberger.

sible public rural policy may be achieved when the Church, among other institutions, does its job in influencing public mood at all levels.

Big business currently saturates the public with the profit perspective. As a result, persons analyze issues from a financial point of view. Therefore, if public policy is to create greater profits regardless of other factors, the public often is satisfied. The result may be catastrophic, as I have depicted above, and will analyze in detail in Chapter 2 of this project.

What I believe would be beneficial is for the Church to provide a clearly Christian perspective based on the deepest Biblical, theological, and ethical foundations. With this Christian perspective deeply held in people's hearts and minds their problem analysis should result in policy matters more thoughtful of people and nature. The resulting action on behalf of the policy may begin to allow for God's healing power and presence in rural America. The fundamental task of the Church, then, is to provide a Biblically sound and ecological foundation for people to grasp, to accept, and to do.

I believe the best way to do this on the local church level is through evangelism...calling people to the concrete love of Christ for their lives, as expressed deeply personally and socially and therefore spiritually in the life of a congregation dedicated to serving the Lord. The Good

News will then become the Good News of old, that we are saved by God who loves us where we are by healing and cleansing us of the overt and covert things we think and do, which tear us down and eventually destroy us. In our accepting this love we accept the Christ who served the community and helped others. Surely this same Christ is at work saving rural America from the "powers and principalities" (Romans 8.38) which seek to destroy it.

D. Limitations of the Project:

Though this subject provides infinite amounts of material, I must work within the framework of School of Theology at Claremont requirements including less than one hundred pages and incorporating material from my courses of study at STC. This is not intended as a Ph. D. level dissertation, but rather a professional project for the parish minister showing ability to deal with a complex issue. I will be touching the areas of evangelism, Biblical theology, and ethics. I will limit this study to the American rural problem of land use necessarily encompassing a spectrum of issues to show the interrelatedness of each, including such issues as land ownership rights, land use, ecological impact, related public policy formation and the theological and Biblical role of the Church in providing both direction for policy formation and hope for people's lives. I will limit my examples to those of Northern Great Plains coal issues and

general agricultural-related issues with the understanding that I do not intend to deal in great depth with either. Rather, the purpose of this project is to propose a broad guideline for dealing with rural policy problems through the Church's evangelistic witness. I will not deal with forest, heavy industry, commercial, recreation or any other type of land use other than those uses related to agriculture and energy consumption as stated above. I will not deal with the farm labor problem as we know it from the perspective of such organizations as the United Farm Workers; as important as this is.

I am not proposing policy: I am proposing guidelines to be followed in the formulation and implementation of policy.

This is a project at synthesizing rather than in-depth development of an issue, or series of related issues.

#### E. Definition of Terms:

By contemporary rural America I mean all the dynamics and impacts which the USDA, as a result of the Rome Food Conference, forced upon U.S. agricultural lands and people. Contemporary rural America is a land torn apart by coal and grain production as the U.S. seeks energy independence and "agripower as its new defense."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

. By policy I refer to public mood. This public mood results in laws which affect numerous areas including taxation, markets, land use, land abuse and land ownership.

Environment includes the interrelationships of the land, its chemical and mineral components, its water systems, its "fruits" (crops, etc.), and its people. To comprehend my definition of environment one must understand the concept of eco-justice. Eco-justice relates to fairness in environmental concerns. Within the concept of eco-justice are concerns for the carrying capacity of the land. The carrying capacity is determined by such variables as the amount and/or kinds of crops, water, additives, people and machinery, the land can handle productively without itself being destroyed. Justice in ecological concerns results only when land, water and air are passed on to succeeding generations in the same or better conditions than when they were inherited.

When I speak of the Church, I mean people, people joined and living in response to God's love for them by sharing God's message of life's fullness through responsible stewardship of resources and love for humanity. The term "Church" specifically means the United Methodist Church, but can be expanded to include all churches.

Social Justice includes responsibility in human relationships. Such concerns as equal representation, fairness and meaningfulness in vocation all come under the rubrics of social justice. In this thesis policy consider-

ation will include further elements of social justice where people are more important than business and profits.

F. Work Previously Done in the Field:

Many denominations are at work formulating policy statements. Among these are the United Methodist, Mennonite, Roman Catholic, Friends, Lutherans and others. I have not found any, however, to deal with policy formation in depth and in terms of evangelism.

G. Methodology:

I did do library and Biblical research into land use issues as well as incorporate material from classes at STC in the areas of Social Witness, Ethics, Old Testament and Missions. Once again, the task for me is to synthesize a vast amount of material into a comprehensible unit in much the way that the parish minister must do.

H. Outline of Project:

Chapter One has included a statement of the problem, why it is important, a statement of the thesis: "Since public policy reflects public mood, responsible public rural policy may be achieved when the Church, among other institutions, does its job in influencing public mood on all levels", and items of importance to the writing of a professional project including limitations of the project.

definition of terms, and methodology followed.

Chapter Two will deal more concisely with issues affecting rural America. I will show how these issues express themselves physically, emotionally, and theologically; what the results of these issues are upon rural America; the causes of these problems; and finally how one may begin to deal with the problems in terms of questions of eco-justice and of social justice.

In Chapter Three I examine various Biblical and theological perspectives on stewardship, community, and salvation. I begin with a look at Old Testament perspectives on stewardship, move on to their implications for contemporary life, and conclude the chapter with an analysis of a contemporary ethical source of justice.

An exposition on some guidelines I propose which should be considered in the formulation of just farm and food policy is the subject of Chapter Four. Each of these guidelines results from issues and insights raised in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Five includes my proposal for strategy for ministry in rural America. I believe that evangelism should be based on Christians' offering a more Christian perspective on issues; analyzing problems out of that Christian perspective; helping to form policy based upon that Christian analysis; and moving people to action in order to test and live out their new-found faith. I begin with the message of per-

sonal salvation which comes from Christ, express the fullness of this message in terms of social consequences (rural land, farm, and food issues), and challenge people to witness for Christ by serving him in areas of interest to rural America: aiding in the formation of policy affecting rural America.

Chapter Six is a summary of the major points raised in this project followed by a concise conclusion of one page.

The Appendix includes an original sermon illustrating how I may preach on this topic.

## Chapter 2

### ISSUES ADVERSELY AFFECTING RURAL AMERICA

Rural American society apparently is rapidly becoming a mere prelude to an unfolding drama of deterioration. Let me explain what I mean: With increasing demands by government to overcome the food and energy shortages<sup>1</sup> our rural lands have felt the impact through soil erosion,<sup>2</sup> pollution,<sup>3</sup> and ground water destruction.<sup>4</sup> "Each year about 1.25 million acres of rural land, one third of it cultivated crop land, is given over to intensive (industrial) use."<sup>5</sup> This breaks down to the fact that 2.5 million acres are pulled out of farm production while 1.25 million acres are taken from soil bank and put into production, showing a net loss of only 1.25 million acres.<sup>6</sup> People have not remained unaffected. A sense of helplessness, depression, worthlessness and hope-

<sup>1</sup>"World Food Experts Call for End to Production Curbs," Los Angeles Times (July 1, 1976), Part 1, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard M. Cantor, A World Geography of Irrigation (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 55.

<sup>3</sup>K. Ross Toole, The Rape of the Great Plains (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), pp. 56, 174, 181, 189, et al.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Allaby and Floyd Allen, Robots Behind the Plow (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press, 1974), pp. 48, 74.

<sup>5</sup>Council on Environmental Quality, The Sixth Annual Report (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 163.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

lessness which has long dwelt among some city people is now infecting many rural people.<sup>7</sup> For many people who may have wanted to enter farming, there is now only a doubtful future in it. No matter how hard many farmers work, their financial returns seldom cover operational costs.<sup>8</sup> For many people, excessive use of chemicals for fertilizers and insecticides<sup>9</sup> and the danger of declining water supplies<sup>10</sup> makes rural America a questionable place to live.

A. The Issues:

1. Land Ownership. First of all, when the issue is examined as to who actually owns land in rural America I discover:

As land ownership falls into the hands of distant corporations or individuals, local self-determination is lost. The remaining residents become subject to decisions made far from the local community and made on the basis of return on investment rather than the well-being of rural people or rural communities. There is the accompanying movement of political power out of the community so that even the decisions made by public bodies become more responsive to urban financial interests than to local human and community interests.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Toole, pp. 96, 103, 108-110, 218.

<sup>8</sup>Campaign for Human Development, Poverty In American Democracy (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), pp. 138ff.

<sup>9</sup>Allaby and Allen, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup>Cantor, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup>Campaign for Human Development, p. 138.

It is revealing to note who owns how much land in order to get a more accurate picture of the problem.

Here, on a national basis, are some of the major absentee land owners and the acreages they control. Most of the data comes from annual reports and Moody's manuals. For purposes of comparing ownership with imaginable land areas, keep in mind that the area of Rhode Island is 768,000 acres, of New Jersey 4.8 million acres.

<u>Energy Companies</u>	<u>U.S. acreage</u> (including some offshore)
Standard Oil of Indiana	20.3 million
Texaco	9.9 "
Mobil	7.8 "
Gulf	7.5 "
Phillips Petroleum	5.3 "
Standard Oil of California	5.2 "
Continental Oil	4.5 "
Union Oil	4.1 "
 <u>Railroads</u>	
<u>Surface and mineral rights (acres)</u>	
Burlington Northern	8.4 million
Union Pacific	7.9 "
Southern Pacific	5.1 "
St. Louis and San Francisco	1.4 "

On a county-by-county basis, a Nader team found that the top 20 landowners in rural counties (i.e., a fraction of one per cent of the population) generally owned 25 to 50 per cent of the land.<sup>12</sup>

With such figures in mind it is not difficult to understand who holds political and economical clout. Obviously rural inhabitants hold neither the proportional power nor the proportional land that large corporations own.

To the phenomena that large land-owners comprising a fraction of one per cent of the population generally own 25 to 50 per cent of the land<sup>13</sup> add the rising cost of food<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

and it becomes apparent where the financial returns are going. It is certainly not back into the improvement of rural communities and the land. "Since 1952, the cost of food in retail stores has increased by 43 per cent, but farmers have received only a 6 per cent increase. The middlemen have sopped up the difference."<sup>15</sup> As land and money increase in the hands of the few, often in marketing and financial centers be they Spokane, Kansas City, or Chicago, opportunities for youth to enter farming are becoming fewer and fewer.<sup>16</sup> The average age of farmers in the United States is reaching 54 years<sup>17</sup> indicating that young people obviously are entering farming in only limited numbers.

2. American Energy Independence. As I continue to look at the superficial problems I see that our pursuit of energy independence causes multitudinous adverse conditions with which rural America is evidently inept to deal. As open pit coal mining increases in a particular area, a boom in population of that area creates problems beyond those caused by the coal mining itself.<sup>18</sup> "The induced activity

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Harold Guither (ed.) Who Will Control U.S. Agriculture? (Urbana, IL: North Central Regional Extension Publications, August 1972), *passim*.

<sup>17</sup>Campaign for Human Development, p. 141.

<sup>18</sup>Council on Environmental Quality, p. xviii.

(of new energy sources) causes additional direct environmental impacts...The population influx may create greater land use impacts and place higher demands on public services than the energy facility that began the process.<sup>19</sup> New sewer and water lines, utility services, fire and police protection, roads, schools and homes must be created.<sup>20</sup> This may create a whole new social structure, bringing with it many related social problems which come with population increase.

3. Effect Upon Persons. What happens to people when their land and social structure is so destroyed? Often they become despondent in the face of meaninglessness in that their land and communities are no longer conducive to wholesome life.<sup>21</sup> Hence they turn to the cities for employment and excitement or to alcohol or drugs to rid them of their emotional pain.<sup>22</sup> My observation is that meaningful existence spirals downward from there. Suicide, divorce, farm and family abandonment, bankruptcy,...all are not uncommon in contemporary rural America.<sup>23</sup>

As much of rural America continues in its often futile efforts to try to retain its traditional stability more and more of its inhabitants are feeling increasingly trapped: The Northern Cheyenne are a good example. Here is

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Toole, pp. 108-110.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

a people who have learned to live off the land, to respect it and let it provide as it will. Into their fragile existence with the land came the coal interests with the United States government such as the Energy Commission, Bureau of Mines, and Bureau of Indian Affairs backing among others. What could they do? They were trapped: "The Northern Cheyenne found themselves, caught not merely in this giant and complex machine; they were also caught in the high-powered machinations of huge energy companies."<sup>24</sup> I believe that being enslaved is a terrible predicament, allowing for no sense of self-determination or responsibility; denying people their human freedom.

4. The Theological Problem. Within all this is a theological problem expressed by Pope Pius XII in his 1942 Christmas radio message: "The Church cannot ignore nor overlook the fact that the worker, in his efforts to better his lot, is opposed by a machinery which is not in accordance with nature, but is at variance with God's plan and with the purpose he had in creating the goods of this earth."<sup>25</sup> Today it appears to me that the Church and its people neither share in nor understand God's design for agricultural life, for stewardship of the land and its resources, and for communities of people living together, relating with one-an-

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>25</sup>Piero Gheddo, Why Is The Third World Poor? (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), p. 10.

other. I say this because I see the Church in rural America doing little, if anything, to effectively and constructively combat the aforementioned problems.

B. The Results:

In my observation rural America has become physically, mentally and theologically poor. The gradual destruction of rural America by excessive grain and energy pursuits impacts the environment,<sup>26</sup> rural people,<sup>27</sup> and theology. What are the results of this destruction?

1. Soil Erosion. Initially, the U.S. pursuit for grain has put so much marginal land under the plow that erosion due to wind and water is removing increasingly large amounts of prime soil.<sup>28</sup> To complicate matters, efforts to curb new production demands and thereby slow soil erosion, are to my knowledge non-existent within government. It appears that the United States Government refuses to acknowledge what is really happening in rural America. In reference to this new land being cultivated the US Council on Environmental Quality concludes:

There is some concern that much of this new acreage

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<sup>26</sup>Council on Environmental Quality, loc. cit.

<sup>27</sup>Toole, loc. cit.

<sup>28</sup>Allaby and Allen, p. 48.

is marginal, better kept in pasture or forage because it is susceptible to erosion, dust storms, and other natural forces that cause rapid soil depletion. A recent report to the U.S. Senate examines these issues and concludes that although soil conservation measures are necessary in many new areas, a new dust bowl is unlikely.<sup>29</sup>

Comparing this statement with such overwhelming information pointing to excessive erosion scattered throughout our nation's newspapers including the one example already cited in this study<sup>30</sup> I discover that a new dust bowl is in fact highly likely!

2. Coal Pursuit and Land Destruction. To further complicate the issue, the form of agriculture in the United States is highly energy inefficient. That is, U.S. farmers generally use far greater amounts of energy through petroleum to run farm equipment, and more amounts of petrochemical sprays and fertilizers to increase production than the farmers ever realize in the resulting food energy itself.<sup>31</sup> As the U.S. continues such agriculture methods it obviously grows increasingly dependent upon decreasing petroleum supplies.

Another example of the energy problem and its relationship to agriculture is that the United States goes all out developing new energy resources to the point that this

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<sup>29</sup> Council on Environmental Quality, p. 180.

<sup>30</sup> "Wind Erosion Damages Great Plains Acreage", Los Angeles Times (March 6, 1976), Part 1, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Allaby and Allen, p. 48.

new energy-finding activity creates even more destruction than the agriculture for which, in part, it is intended: As coal companies tear off overburden to get at underlying coal they destroy fragile geological formations which hold ground water in the water table so necessary to keeping the Great Plains a grass land rather than a desert.<sup>32</sup> What is seen on television under the guise of energy company reclamation, a young couple riding over lovely green hills "reclaimed" by the energy company after extracting the coal,<sup>33</sup> is in my consideration, a temporary superficial remedy! The landscape will soon turn brown when the grass dies and gray with blowing soil as irrigation ceases to run with water, lost to seepage beyond the reach of wells, no longer retained in underground tables for future use.<sup>34</sup>

3. Large Population Influxes. One could go on citing land destruction due to erosion, salination, nitrate concentrations and other artificial pollutants all resulting from our grain and coal pursuits,<sup>35</sup> but let me turn to view one other negative environmental result of our "all systems go for grain and coal" mentality.<sup>36</sup> That is, there are also

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<sup>32</sup>Toole, *passim*.

<sup>33</sup>Exxon Television Commercial, 1976.

<sup>34</sup>Toole. <sup>35</sup>Toole, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup>The Nixon-Ford-Carter emphasis on energy procurement.

secondary impacts to increased industrial activity in rural America.

"An example of secondary impacts may be found in increased western mining activity. Equipment suppliers might open new offices and fabrication plants in the west. A newly built coal liquefaction plant could attract a petrochemicals industry based on coal liquids as a feedstock."<sup>37</sup>

From such related industries and their demands for workers come new families requiring schools, roads, stores, sewers and water supplies...all placing new stresses on an already threatened environment.

4. Impacts on People. But what of the impact on people? What are the results of this problem for millions of Americans living in rural areas? Where once people in small rural towns were proud of their communities and took interest in their neighbors,<sup>38</sup> today rural towns are often as inhumane as are the cities which rural people sought to evade.<sup>39</sup> K. Ross Toole describes small towns: "They are not very often pretty; they are characterized by a large number of bars per capita, by a large number of "farm equipment dealers, by one motion picture theater...Recreational fist-fights are common."<sup>40</sup> He goes on,

Until very recently, serious crime had a very low incidence in the ranch towns, though that is now changing. Young people, under drinking age, are often without recreational facilities. Recent outmigration of young

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<sup>38</sup>Toole.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

people has caused some shrinkage in population, otherwise stable.<sup>41</sup>

Though population has been one aspect of rural towns that has remained relatively stable, even that often changes, especially when the coal companies come to town!<sup>42</sup>

Gillette, Wyoming, a town drastically changed by an earlier oil boom, may provide some indication as to what may happen when the coal boom hits the Great Plains. Gillette is a classic example of what happens to rural towns when they grow too fast from outside influx of people. Eldon V. Kohrs, a clinical psychologist, describes Gillette in terms of increased "alcoholism, accidents, absenteeism, depression, divorce, and delinquency."<sup>43</sup> Not only is the land being destroyed, as we have already documented, but so are the people. However some, drawing strength from their ancestors and courage from their battles to live off the harsh and fragile land, will not give up: In opposition to the coal companies' invasion,

On the Tongue River near Birney (Montana), the fifth generation owner of the Bones Brother's Ranch, a very pretty, articulate Carolyn Anderson, puts it this way, "To those of you who would exploit us, do not underestimate the people of this area. Do not make the mistake of lumping us and the land all together as 'overburden' and dispense with us as nuisances. Land is historically the central issue in any war. We are the descendants, spiritually, if not actually, of those who fought for this land once, and we are prepared to do it again. We intend to win."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

Carolyn Anderson points to the spiritual dimension of this deep issue. It affects peoples' lives. Not only today is there taking place a budding realization that people can destroy the environment forever; there is also the fear that with the destruction of the land comes the death of its people.<sup>45</sup>

C. The Causes:

1. Noted Personalities' Statements. First, the problems are enhanced by continual calls by noted academic and governmental personnel for all out grain production: Glenn Burton, research geneticist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, speaking at the World Food Conference in Ames, Iowa, said, "The World cannot feed itself unless it changes its ways."<sup>46</sup> I agree. Yet Burton was calling for all out grain production by U.S. farmers.<sup>47</sup> I see other changes far more fundamental and necessary, as I shall propose in chapter four of this project. However, Sylvan Wittwer of Michigan State University agreeing with Burton adds, "The immediate solution to the world food shortage lies in all out grain production."<sup>48</sup> Though this may be an immediate solution (and this is even debatable) I believe it is both far from a responsible long range solution to food shortages and it cer-

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> "World Food Experts....", loc. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

tainly has profound negative consequences for rural America.

2. Project Energy Independence. Likewise, President Ford's Project Independence directed toward America's independence from foreign sources for our heavy oil demands has further caused energy companies to destroy the land and its people in pursuit of coal.<sup>49</sup> President Carter's policies appear to continue those of President Ford's. Though billions of dollars are now spent on developing alternative sources of energy including solar and thermal, these efforts trail decisively behind money spent on new oil field exploration and atomic energy production.<sup>50</sup>

3. Inequitable Tax System. Let me return to the grain problem and look at but one source of the night-mare for independent rural farmers: the inequitable tax system. The cost of taxation is rapidly minimizing the amount of many farmers' returns<sup>51</sup> and is forcing many independent farmers out, paving the way for takeover by large corporations based far from the land which they are coming to own.<sup>52</sup> For

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<sup>49</sup> Council on Environmental Quality, pp. 127ff.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Robert J. Gloudemans, Use-Value Farmland Assessments (Chicago: International Association of Assessing Officers, Research and Technical Service, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Campaign for Human Development, p. 138.

example, in five Tennessee counties farmland is assessed at between one-hundred dollars and five-hundred dollars per acre while coal and timber (millions of dollars worth) are assessed at between thirty and forty dollars per acre.<sup>53</sup> The farmers are consequently forced from their farms by prohibitive taxes, their land left to be purchased by corporations who can legally use their farming losses as a tax write-off.<sup>54</sup> The United States Catholic Conference's Campaign for Human Development, in its book, Poverty in American Democracy:

Corporations buy into farms and operate them at a loss because the money lost there can be written off their income in other divisions of the corporation. This tends to result in corporate ownership of land, absentee land ownership, and the destruction of small farmers who must operate at a profit and cannot compete with tax loss corporate farming.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore,

Absentee land ownership (has) produced a decline in family farms; rural poverty or displacement to urban areas; higher food prices which bring little remuneration back to the farmers who are left; and consumers who have little or no option when it comes to purchasing food.<sup>56</sup>

Those who argue for use-value farmland assessment (I raise this proposal in chapter four) as a way of dealing with this facet of the larger taxation problem run into rigid opposition: Some of the arguments include studies showing that;

1. the effect of Use-value Farmland Assessments upon actual

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., pp. 135ff.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

land use is negligible; 2. when the overall taxbase is reduced either tax rates in other areas must be increased or public services curtailed; 3. administrative problems such as a) defining "agriculture", b) determining whether use-requirements are being met, and c) developing criteria for determining use-value; and 4. many tax administrators and students of public finance feel that all real property should be valued for taxation purposes upon a full market value basis or a uniform percentage thereof, and that all forms of property tax relief should either be confined to the determination of levy rates or to exemptions and rebates.<sup>57</sup> As one can determine for oneself, the over-taxation angle of the farmer's plight is a complicated one.

It appears to me that people are unprepared to deal with these problems. "Participation in and control of the political economy by most citizens is minimal."<sup>58</sup> For example, few people realize and know how to deal with Del Monte's consideration of moving its asparagus to Mexico where it will receive greater tax credits and lower labor costs among other savings.<sup>59</sup> The result would be that "thousands of farmers, farm workers and cannery workers in the U.S. will lose their livelihood,"<sup>60</sup> and twenty-two

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<sup>57</sup>Gloudemans, p. 12.

<sup>58</sup>Campaign for Human Development, p. 130.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

counties throughout the nation would be drastically affected.<sup>61</sup> People seem to be "losing". Large corporations and their few executives seem to be "winning". The U.S. Department of Agriculture clearly sides with the corporations in the policies it proposes as evidenced so far in this discussion!

4. Unreliable Water Supplies. Unreliable water supplies in some areas are a fourth cause of the problem. All of the United States is in the 10-30% variable annual precipitation category as computed through data compiled by the World Meteorological Organization.<sup>62</sup> This means that up to 30% of the U.S. rainfall cannot be depended upon as stable. This may express itself in numerous ways ranging from 10-30 years drought per hundred years on one extreme to an increasing number of years of sub-normal precipitation throughout the 100 years on the other extreme. This leads me to believe that water conservation, when water is in abundance, is important so rural America may have water to carry it through the times when none is available.

There is so much to the water problem that we are only just now beginning to understand. For example,

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Earl O. Heady, "The Agriculture of the United States," Scientific American, CCXXXV, 3 (September 1976) 107-127.

"Irrigation farming is, in general, very wasteful in its use of water,"<sup>63</sup> due to various reasons: a) farmers' lack of knowledge of water requirements of crops, b) adverse effect upon water quality so that larger quantities are required for crop growth, and c) immense losses occur in large-scale storage in ditches, canals, and reservoirs from leakage, evaporation, and transpiration.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, some researchers are not clear as to whether each crop has its own water requirement, or whether each land area at a given time of year has its water requirement regardless of crop.<sup>65</sup> Obviously many researchers are still very unclear about responsible water stewardship. It has been reported that there is a 17-45% water loss due to seepage alone in parts of the Western United States.<sup>66</sup>

The supply of irrigation water is decreased by sedimentation filling up reservoirs: Lake Mead, for example, received one and a half million acre-feet of silt in the first fifteen years after the completion of Hoover Dam; at that rate of sedimentation the lake would be rendered useless in another 60 years.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Cantor, p. 47.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>F.E. Dominy, "The Water Rush in Russia": Reclamation Era, L, I (February 1964), 2; and F.E. Dominy, Soil and Water Use in the Soviet Union (Washington: USDA, 1959), p. 37, cited by Cantor, p. 50.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

There is a human element to the water conservation problem: Self-centered narrow interests, anti-socialism, and a variety of other forces have historically helped to defeat numerous water-conservation measures in Texas.<sup>68</sup> The rhetorical question, "In what other areas might this also be true?" may legitimately be asked.

Finally, various studies show that there will be a 20-70% decline in irrigated acreage due to lost ground water in some aquifers in Arizona, New Mexico and Texas counties by 2000 A.D.<sup>69</sup> There is expected to be about 30% of the 1966 level of storage of aquifer water remaining in 2000 A.D.<sup>70</sup> Or, for all practical purposes, the aquifers in those areas will be depleted by that time at present consumption rates.

5. U.S. Environmental Policies. On the energy front, U.S. environmental policies also cause havoc which endangers parts of rural America. As we seek to curb oil consumption we turn to coal lying under the northern Great Plains.

After the October 1973 Oil embargo, the Congress passed

<sup>68</sup> Donald Edward Green, Land of the Underground Rain (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), pp. 173ff.

<sup>69</sup> A.D. Meister and K.J. Nicol, A Documentation of the National Water Assessment Model of Regional Agriculture Production, Land and Water Use, and Environmental Interaction (Ames: Iowa State University, December 1975), p. 203.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

the Energy Supply and Environmental Coordination Act of 1974. ESECA required the Administrator of the Federal Energy Administration to issue orders prohibiting any powerplant with the capability to burn coal from burning natural gas or petroleum products as a primary energy source. In addition, REA may issue prohibition orders to other major fuel-burning installations, large factories, for example. In the short term, prohibiting consumption of natural gas or oil forces conversion to coal.<sup>71</sup>

Not only does tearing up the ground in pursuit of coal cause massive destruction, but there is more. Proposed huge coal-fired power plants will belch thick clouds of pollution into the atmosphere raining toxic material on farm land and people for hundreds of miles.<sup>72</sup> Although not coal-related, air pollution drifting from cities is already destroying crops in such areas as Industry and Chino, California, ten and thirty-five miles, respectively, from Los Angeles.<sup>73</sup> And this is but one example. Further, "in early 1975 the Administration proposed a number of ammendments to the Clean Air Act. The major new authority would allow delays to 1985 for compliance by such facilities (coal-fired power plants)."<sup>74</sup> Project 'energy independence', as my studies clearly reveal, adds to polluted air and its myriad of negative consequences.

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<sup>71</sup> Council on Environmental Quality, p. 123.

<sup>72</sup> Toole, pp. 5, 155-156.

<sup>73</sup> KNBC Television, news report, Los Angeles, August, 1976.

<sup>74</sup> Council on Environmental Quality, p. 50.

6. People's Theological Insufficiency. Finally, people's theological insufficiency, in part their adherence to a partial rather than to a holistic Gospel, may further add to the problem's causes. Too few Christians in today's society may also be a contributing factor. This, of course, is difficult to document. However, I do observe that too many Christians assume that salvation comes with only an intellectual or emotional acceptance of Christ's love without going on to perfection, as Wesley would say, in loving God by serving God.<sup>75</sup> It may be that many people today have failed to confess Christ in both word and deed in our American society. This, also, is difficult to document. However, it appears obvious that the many conflicting values and demands placed upon us, in part, by our economic structure, may add to the difficulty of witnessing to Christ in "deed".

Economic structures may...obscure the confession of Christ. In consumer economics, whether capitalistic or socialistic, there is stress upon productivity, competition and materialistic values. This increases the gap between the industrialized nations and the Third World and further decreases the quality of life in the industrialized societies. Thus while we confess a Christ who frees and unites, the economic structures in which we live tend to enslave to wealth and divide.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> John Wesley, John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 251ff.

<sup>76</sup> Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975, The Official Report of the World Council of Churches (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 47.

Dan Rhoades analyzes our current state of personal and social affairs as being in the "socio-technological epoch".<sup>77</sup> He says that today the private value has become the personal ethic.<sup>78</sup> Whatever is important for the pleasure of the self is best.<sup>79</sup> This "ethic" is supported by society's overarching "ethic" which says that the materialistic standard is the social ethic.<sup>80</sup> In otherwords, the more material gains people can gather collectively, in their institutions, the better is the society. The result is that as individuals try to get more for themselves they support institutional efforts to bring them such goods. However, where institutions once served individuals, institutions now rule individuals both by taking from them what the masses may want and by dictating to the masses the "good" they should desire.<sup>81</sup> Hence, as I see it in light of Rhoades' analyses, some people imagine society improves as more people get bigger automobiles, warmer swimming pools, coal-fired power plants and grain-fed beef. The problem with this thought pattern is of course that not every human and societal need has a technological "fix".<sup>82</sup> Some needs are fundamental human problems and require a

<sup>77</sup> Dan Rhoades. Notes for the class "Ethical Dimensions of Global Responsibility," School of Theology at Claremont, Fall 1975.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

different order for a solution. That different order, I believe, is a Christian perspective which people have failed to search out, accept, and do. Rural America appears to be rapidly accepting a technological or industrial solution to its agricultural needs. This solution, as I have shown, is wreaking havoc on our land and its people. "In our time, the main danger to the soil, and therewith not only to agriculture but to civilization as a whole, stems from the townsman's determination to apply to agriculture the principles of industry."<sup>83</sup> God created nature with a fragile balance that any good high school biology student understands. I believe that this balance is becoming altered not only with nature but also with the economy, society and theology.

#### D. The Problem's Two Categories:

I see the essential problem falling into two manageable categories, those of environmental questions and those of social justice questions, both which I defined in Chapter 1. In the former category I place such problems as a) pollution: by waste of energy through farming techniques; oil-based chemicals added to the soil; sulfur in the air from coal-fueled power plants; increased nitrate concentrations in the soil and water; and sedimentation in the lakes and

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<sup>83</sup> E.F. Schumacher, Small Is Beautiful (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 109.

ponds, b) destruction of the water-table through strip coal mining; depletion of aquifers through deep-well irrigation, c) soil erosion through excessive plowing and opening up of new land to grain production; and d) people's acceptance of a "technological fix" which purports to solve the world's problems while it actually destroys the environment.

In the latter category (social justice) I place such problems as: a) land ownership, which is falling from the individual's hands into those of corporations; b) agricultural income, which increasingly goes to the "middle man" and taxes and not to the farmer; c) population, which may increase beyond manageable proportions for small towns to handle if large coal-fired energy-producing power plants are created in the northern Great Plains; d) people, who are growing separated from the land and whose lives are becoming increasingly meaningless; and e) people who have few Biblical or theological resources with which to deal with the ensuing personal and social issues.

This is the problem briefly defined. In chapter 3 I will reflect upon these issues from theological perspectives in search of an answer or direction which is more humane, more ecologically just, and more theologically sound. Then, in chapter 4 I will draw issues and theological insights together as a way of forming guidelines for U.S. food and farm policy proposals.

### Chapter 3

#### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON STEWARDSHIP, COMMUNITY AND SALVATION

A vast number of Americans have lost a sense of being an integral part of a continuous something or anything.

That is why it is so difficult, perhaps, for so many Americans to understand that no man is the product merely of his own years or of his own time. He is the creature of accumulation. It is equally difficult for Americans to understand that all people and nations are also such long-term products.<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand the church's role in dealing with Rural America's highly environmental, political and spiritual problems one must realize that historical, Biblical and theological sources support a responsible effort by the church in this realm. In this chapter I will investigate such sources and let them outline a Christian Faith perspective for the church to follow as I shall more fully develop in chapters 4 and 5 of this project.

Though there are many sub-topics I could pursue under this heading I will limit this examination to those of stewardship, justice, and holistic salvation. By "holistic salvation" I mean spiritual and physical wholeness. Holistic Salvation is not limited to psychological well-being, but includes environmental and social well-being. I will expand on this with more detail in chapter 5.

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<sup>1</sup>K. Ross Toole, The Rape of the Great Plains (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), p. 33.

Today many people are concerned with their own salvation. However, in their own search to understand and live in these times they have turned a deaf ear on the church and its message, in part, because the message has failed to speak to issues relevant to them. I believe that with an adequate understanding of what God intends for people in the way of "spiritual" living, the church's message will be relevant to people and many people will pay attention to what is proclaimed. This is not to say people will accept God's salvation for their lives, but at least God's message will be relevant to their concerns and at most a more creative and positive life will emerge in rural America.

A. An Old Testament Perspective on Stewardship:

To begin, I will examine an Old Testament perspective on stewardship. In order to understand how our Hebrew ancestors arrived at a concern for stewardship we must understand what life itself meant for them, how they saw themselves created.

1. Hebrew Relationship to Yahweh. A good way of getting at this is to investigate the dimensions of their closest relationship with Yahweh, God, a relationship which in its highest form led to wisdom. In Proverbs 1.7 we read, "The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom" (RSV). What is meant by "fear of Yahweh"? For the Hebrew people Deuter-

onomy outlines "fear of Yahweh" to mean "to love Yahweh (Deut. 10.12), to serve him and cleave to him (Deut. 10.20), to walk in his ways (Deut. 8.6), to follow him (Deut. 13.5)."<sup>2</sup> Such closeness to God is the beginning of wisdom and is the beginning of living in accord with God's intentions for human life on earth. In other words, initially people were seen in close relationship to God to the extent to which they did God's work. Hence, to be close to God meant to live a highly ethical life.

2. Ethical Living. What then was the basis for ethical living? Even before understanding the basis as what God would have people do, we discover that God created people in a particular way which served to define both their limitations and possibilities. God intended for people to do a certain minimum and to have multitudinous possibilities based upon the nature of their creation.<sup>3</sup>

The following is a summarization of Rolf Knierim's Old Testament view of human's created nature. Genesis 2.7 says that humans are made of "dust from the ground" and they "return to the ground (Gen. 3.19). Therefore humans belong to the ground, since they are created out of the ground

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<sup>1</sup>Rolf Knierim, "Spirituality in the Old Testament" (unpublished paper presented in class by the same title, School of Theology at Claremont, Fall, 1975)

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

without which they could not exist. Furthermore, not only are humans made out of the ground, but they also live from the ground (Prov. 12.11; 28.19; 24.27; 20-24; Is. 5.1f) and God empowers the ground itself to produce food (Gen. 2.9). And finally, in the end, humans return to the ground, to dust.<sup>4</sup>

3. Salvation. For Old Testament people, salvation comes in living with God, in this life. There is no concept of life after death.<sup>5</sup> They are concerned only with ethical living, now!

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices  
 my body also dwells secure.  
 For Thou does not give me up to Sheol,  
 or let Thy godly one see the Pit.  
 Thou dost show me the path of life;  
 in thy presence there is fullness of joy,  
 in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore.  
 (Psalm 16.9-11, RSV)

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord  
 in the land of the living! (Psalm 27.13, RSV)

So teach us to number (value)<sup>6</sup> our days  
 so that we may get a heart of wisdom. (doing in  
 accord with God)<sup>7</sup> (Psalm 90.12, RSV)

This limited but representative evidence points both to humans' close relationship to the land in this life and to the ethical nature ("path of life") of such a relationship.

In Ecclesiastes we find this relationship even extended to the depths of human frustration and despair.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

So I hated life, because what is done under the sun is grievous unto me; for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me; and who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toils of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a man who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by a man who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and strain with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of pain, and his work is a vexation; even in the night his mind does not rest. This also is vanity. (Ecc. 2.17-23, RSV)

It is interesting to note that in much the same way some rural people today live in a love-hate relationship with the ground and with their God:

Last August I stood in the middle of a withered pasture with a seventy-six-year-old rancher who was muttering and cursing about the dry year. He was cursing the grasshoppers, the dust, the curling grass, the trickle of water in the ditch. He was calling the wrath of God down on cattle buyers, leasehounds, and the Department of Agriculture. Suddenly it started to rain. He looked up at the dark sky and shouted, "And where were you, you son-of-a-bitch, when I needed you last spring!"<sup>8</sup>

What we see in these two previous passages are humans who understand their true identity...that they are created and dependent upon God,<sup>9</sup> that they are less than God in that they toil in the ground, and that they know who they are through their fear and knowledge of God. Such living in

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<sup>8</sup>Toole, p. 79.

<sup>9</sup>Knierim, p. 31.

close relationship with God is the seed which grows into the full organism of the Old Testament Biblical view of spirituality involving both what humans think and what they do in relation to God's created order and God's inspired will.

4. Stewardship. Stewardship becomes one highly focused way for humans to live out their spirituality, for stewardship involves both thinking and acting responsibly for God and for God's creation. In the Old Testament, Israel's basic dependence for food, the fuel of life, found its primary focus in the ground. Hence they took utmost care of the ground, honoring its fertility at festivals<sup>10</sup> of seedtime and harvest and praising God for this wonderful gift. Furthermore they believed that all humans belong to all the ground, as does all the ground provide the substance from which all humans live.<sup>11</sup> Genesis 6.1 reads, "men began to multiply upon the face of the ground (soil)" (RSV). All people depend upon the ground for the many blessings it can provide for all. Still further, there being no parcel ownership of land,<sup>12</sup> all the land belongs to all the people, making later and contemporary forms of land ownership, from a Biblical perspective, only a moment of trusteeship by the

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<sup>10</sup>Exodus 23.16

<sup>11</sup>Knierim.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

"owner" that the land might be used wisely for the good of all. As we see then, "agricultural activities of the humans is a basic implementation of their earthly condition."<sup>13</sup> It follows then that "man's agricultural existence is the fundamental economical outgrowth of the earthbound human condition."<sup>14</sup>

B. Implications for Contemporary Existence:

What does all this mean for contemporary American? First I believe agriculture is still the primary mode of existence for humans, in that without the basics of agriculture we would all starve. Secondly, as a gift from God, the land needs utmost care now as it did then. In the land God has created a highly complex mechanism for human's benefit. Every precaution in its use is therefore required. Finally, as humans learn to fear God in God's creation they need also learn God's wisdom in land use and community development. It is in living out of this fear and knowledge of God, enacted through responsible agriculture with humans as stewards of God's land that humans know God's presence in their everyday lives. John J. Compton, puts it this way:

The magnificence of the ordered complexity of the history of nature, as science knows it, can therefore, and still should, excite the wonder and admiration of men for its creative and sustaining source.

At the same time, however, as this view of nature is coherent with a theistic understanding of its mean-

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

ing, it underscores the limits of what we may say of God and thereby reveals our "learned ignorance" concerning him. I say this because it has been clear from the beginning of the science-theology confrontation that the chief source of confusion in this great debate has been the inveterate human tendency to spatialize and temporalize God---to put him outside or alongside the universe, or to place him before it in time or acting at specific moments upon it. We have seen that when this is done, God becomes an addendum to the world, and the postulation of his action as explanation of natural events becomes scientifically preposterous, philosophically naive, and theologically idolatrous.<sup>15</sup>

From these basic Biblical and contemporary ethical insights I believe we can draw a sound stewardship direction for contemporary rural America embracing nature in its fullness rather than viewing its resources as things to be conquered and abused for man's purposes. For it is through nature that God addresses and relates to humans in the most profound way, as Ian Barbour writes:

Biblical man does not claim ultimate dominion; he is trustee and steward, responsible to God in his care of the creation. Moreover, nature is held to have intrinsic value and rights of its own and is not simply an instrument for human purposes; it is a delight to God, quite apart from man. God is concerned for all living things, from the great hippopotamus to the sparrow that falls. Many of the Psalms express appreciation, wonder, and humility in response to natural phenomena. And nature is said to participate in the drama of redemption; it will share in the ultimate harmony that is its final fulfillment.<sup>16</sup>

John Compton addresses the issue of God's immanence in this way:

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<sup>15</sup> John Compton, in Ian Barbour (ed.), Earth Might Be Fair (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Barbour, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

God is not alongside the world, inserting himself into it at special moments, any more than I am behind or alongside my bodily life. He lives through the history of nature as I live through my body. He is that history just as I am my body, and yet he is not exhausted in it.<sup>17</sup>

E. F. Schumacher adds further to this perspective of reverence for the land.

On a wider view, however, the land is seen as a priceless asset which it is man's and happiness "to dress and keep." We can say that man's management of the land must be primarily oriented towards three goals-- health, beauty, and permanence. The fourth goal--- productivity, will then be attained almost as a by-product. The crude materialist view sees agriculture as "essentially directed towards food production." A wider view sees agriculture as having to fulfill at least three tasks:

- to keep man in touch with living nature, of which he is and remains a highly vulnerable part;
- to humanize and ennoble man's wider habitat; and
- to bring forth the foodstuffs and other materials which are needed for a becoming life.<sup>18</sup>

I now come face to face with the current problem, that in America's predominant concern for food production it has neglected the overall responsibility for the beauty of the land, its permanence for future generations, and its life-enhancing potential for those currently working on the land. In this neglect America has overstepped its boundaries and is now on the way to destroying the very land and its people from which and from whom all humans live. It is at this

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<sup>17</sup>Compton, p. 39.

<sup>18</sup>E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 112-113.

precise point--land over-use leading to land and people abuse--that humans and Christians should take a critical look at emerging concepts of systems and limitations.

American history is steeped in a tradition which calls for bigger and better accomplishments throughout, be it opening new land, reaping greater resources, or increasing markets. All have been unhampered by limitations. This traditional mentality may have been fine for seventeenth, eighteenth, and even nineteenth century American businesses including farming and energy pursuits, but this sense of "manifest destiny" can no longer afford to shape our farm and food policies. Emerging systems concepts reveal that everything has its boundaries.<sup>19</sup> These boundaries are never strict, however. They interrelate with the environment.<sup>20</sup> Contemporary rural America's boundaries interrelate with local people's lives, with U.S. agriculture policies and U.S. foreign policies, with land grant colleges and State University departments of agriculture, and with so much more from water tables to soil nutrient counts. Often what is taught our farmers as students in the university affects the kinds of fertilizers they use and the amounts of water required which may affect water quality, water table

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<sup>19</sup>Dan Rhoades. Notes for the class "Ethical Dimensions of Global Responsibility", School of Theology at Claremont, Fall, 1975.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

and river volume, which may in turn affect shipping downstream or the price of oil and petroleum products or the protein content of food placed on America's tables.

Furthermore, as production quality and volume increases or decreases so the commodity market takes a more keen interest, regulating and establishing purchasing and selling prices in volume shares called "futures". Hence, what is produced, bought, sold and eaten is largely based upon what the public expects or hopes for in a product. Likewise agricultural policies are shaped by what the most vocal or interested groups desire.<sup>21</sup> An entity is not only shaped by its past, but it is also shaped by its envisioned future.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, whenever anything becomes radically self-centered or self-interested the result is death because it is severing its ties with its life-giving system be it environment or community.<sup>23</sup> In the case of contemporary agriculture and energy pursuits, an overconcern for food-production and energy self-sufficiency is so raping the land of what it can offer that it is in the process of destroying the land and the systems of which the land is a part, including the ecosystem and the social system.

Biblically and ethically, the church must play its

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<sup>21</sup>Don Parlburg, Statement made at a meeting on agricultural policy Washington, April 1976, reported by C. Dean Freudenberger.

<sup>22</sup>Rhoades.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

role in bringing the Christian vision into contemporary rural America and the policies which govern it. The essential pre-requisite for all that is in this life is the ground that God gives through which humans live. When we therefore consider the welfare of the land and its people we discover at the very root of existence that variables to life other than economic ones exist. In our agribusiness, energy business, and U.S. Department of Agriculture's zeal for profit and power (market control) they have forgotten, and have led many Americans to forget that for food and energy to be produced there must be a concern for a great variety of relationships as well as of individuals. I believe now is the time for the church to raise its holistic vision of salvation for all, regardless of corporation affiliation, geographical location, or economic classification. Farmers and rural people have as much right to be free from toxic concentrations of chemicals on their farms as do consumers from such chemicals in their food. And future generations have as much right to adequate soils, water supplies and petroleum-based chemicals as does the current generation. In order to guarantee these rights both from Biblical and ethical perspectives we now need responsible policies which take into consideration both limitations of resources and of systems as well as all people regardless of their places within the larger social systems. Daniel Day Williams writes,

A...consequence of this new understanding is the politicizing of man's relationship to nature. What nature is, and how man can order his life within it---these are the issues which now have to be resolved within the political order. By "political" I mean the structures of decision-making power that involve the community as a whole.<sup>24</sup>

Based on this understanding of systems and limitations I believe the result is that political solutions must come from value judgements which place value upon the things of God...creation, land and environment, and people (everywhere and always), rather than the things of man...power and profit.

As rural America's people and land are being exploited by power and profit oriented policies I am reminded of Kosuke Koyama's insight:

There is a profoundly disturbing dimension in the biblical proclamation that God, in his saving rule of history, let 'being thrown out' and 'being rejected' of some take place for the many (Matt. 20.28; Mark 10.45; 1 Tim. 2.6). The amazing thing is that this 'arrangement' belongs to the heart of God's salvation history (reconciliation in history), and it is in this way that God will 'unite all things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph. 1.10).<sup>25</sup>

Certainly vast elements of current society are on the outside, being pushed further away from being accepted...from having an adequate environment for personal growth. Surely when rural people are denied clean land, air, water, and a just rural community they too are, as Koyama states, "being

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Day Williams, Barbour, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Kosuke Koyama, Waterbuffalo Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974), pp. 174f.

thrown out, being edged out and being rejected."<sup>26</sup> This leads me to questions of justice which must be answered if rural America is to realize its potential for full citizenship in America and in the world.

C. Contemporary Ethical Sources of Justice:

What is the basis for justice according to our Biblical and ethical sources? Primary in the New Testament is the "new commandment", that we love God above all else and our neighbor as ourself.<sup>27</sup> This love of neighbor is at the root of all New Testament ethics. For in love of neighbor we find the totality of loving others than our own.<sup>28</sup> But how is love expressed in community? I believe the answer is that love is expressed in community through institutional forms of justice.

1. Individual Welfare and Society's Respect. Let me now turn to examine how John Rawls, Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University, outlines a theory of justice which I will adapt to guidelines for food and farm policy formulation in chapter 4 of this project. I do not intend to analyze Rawl's theory, but to use it as a model for construct-

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Matthew 22.34-40 (RSV)

<sup>28</sup>eg., Matthew 5.43-48; Luke 10.30-37.

ing policy outlines for rural America. Dr. Rawls writes, "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought."<sup>29</sup> He continues, "Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override."<sup>30</sup> In other words, in applying this to "project Independence's" dictum that people in western states must be willing to sacrifice for the good of the country as a whole, I discover that such a pronouncement is unjust in that the welfare of the society as a whole is in fact trying to override the welfare of individuals and groups in a particular area. "For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others."<sup>31</sup> However, a society is a complex organism of various factors and arrangements. Different people do and require different things for and of the society. Therefore principles of social justice need to be acknowledged which underwrite the division of advantages according to proper distributive shares:<sup>32</sup> "they provide a way of assigning rights and duties in the basic institutions of society and they define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 3.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., pp. 3f.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

2. Individuals' Rights. For this "assigning of rights and duties" to be just, where each individual is in fact accorded appropriate duties and benefits, one must be consulted as to the amounts and qualities accorded to oneself. In the United States this is called representation. Where individuals or groups are duly represented, the rules which are made by representative bodies can be said to be just for those represented. It stands to reason, then, that "the justness of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and on the economic and social conditions in the various sectors of society."<sup>34</sup>

3. "Fairness". A good question to ask throughout any discussion of how things are assigned and whether conditions are adequate is, "are they fair?" Rawls writes that justice as fairness "conveys the idea that the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair."<sup>35</sup> This initial situation or "original position"<sup>36</sup> includes two primary principles as written below. Remember, these describe the situation in which duties and benefits are allocated in a fair society.

First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others.

Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably ex-

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

pected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.<sup>37</sup>

In chapter 4 I will show how these principles could take shape in rural America.

4. "Difference Principle". However, I must draw attention to another principle which is required in a system with social and economic inequalities. Inequal distribution of social and economic goods can be said to be fair if they are distributed according to the "difference principle"<sup>38</sup> which states:

Assuming the framework of institutions required by equal liberty and fair equality of opportunity, the higher expectations of those better situated are just if and only if they work as part of a scheme which improves the expectations of the least advantaged members of society.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, inequality in distribution of benefits is justified as long as the least advantaged gain from the gain of the most advantaged.<sup>40</sup> This assumes infinite resources,<sup>41</sup> an assumption which contemporary environmentalists expose as false. Again, I will evaluate this in chapter 4 as it applies in rural America.

5. Constraints. Finally, Rawls suggests five formal constraints in which all ethical principles should hold. These restraints serve as a test to measure the just-

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Rhoades.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

ness of ethical principles. "First of all, principles should be general. That is, it must be possible to formulate them without the use of what would be intuitively recognized as proper names, or rigged definite descriptions."<sup>42</sup> Being unconditional, principles should hold for general properties and relations. Second, "principles are to be universal in application. They must hold for everyone."<sup>43</sup> Third, everyone would be aware of the principles, or the principles themselves should be widely publicized so that, reasonably, every individual may be aware of such principles.<sup>44</sup> Fourth, "a conception of right must impose ordering on conflicting claims."<sup>45</sup> This "ordering" guards against appeals to force and cunning and establishes the necessity for adjusting competing demands. "The fifth and last condition is that of finality. The system of principles (is seen) as the final court of appeal in practical reasoning."<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, "these conditions on conceptions of right come to this: A conception of right is a set of principles, general in form and universal in application, that is to be publicly recognized as a final court of appeal for ordering the conflicting claims of moral persons."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Rawls, p. 131.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 133f.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

D. Summary:

In this chapter I have tried to draw some Biblical and ethical guidelines on stewardship and justice which need to be followed in policy proposals if rural America is to come through the various difficulties discussed in chapter 2. I have shown how salvation must be understood in holistic terms, including not only what God does for us, including God's empowering of the land to produce food, but also what God does for us in and through our responsible care of God's gift, the ground of the earth. I have shown that the Bible clearly reveals humanity's close link to the ground and humanity's inherent responsibility to protect the ground from which humans come, live, and to which they return upon death. I have shown how agriculture is the basic mode for such human activity, and that agriculture is as concerned with the physical components of the land as it is with its beauty.

Furthermore, since people live on as well as from the land, it was not only necessary to give ethical guidelines for human interaction with the land, which I call "stewardship" issues, but also to give guidelines for human interaction with other humans, which I have chosen to call "justice" issues. In this area I looked at John Rawls' theory of justice and drew guidelines to construct the rules which govern humans. Among these guidelines were concerns for fairness, equal opportunities and equitable division of

rights and duties.

Let me now show how these may be concretely applied to situations of formulating farm and food policies which affect contemporary rural America.

## Chapter 4

### SOME GUIDELINES TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE FORMULATION OF JUST FARM AND FOOD POLICY

Here I will attempt to propose broad guidelines for rural farm and food policy which should be considered. Let me make it clear that I am not proposing precise policy itself. I offer a perspective: Nothing more; nothing less! I will do this by drawing together Biblical and ethical perspectives and relating them to the problems of stewardship and justice. First I will state eleven broad guidelines resulting from this project's findings. Then, after stating them, I will briefly expand upon each one, within the limitations of this project.

#### A. Guidelines:

1. Initially and overwhelmingly, any attempt at rural farm and food policy formulation must incorporate the insights of rural and farm people themselves.
2. A comprehensive food and farm policy must take into account ways of reducing the dependence upon fossil-fuel based soil and crop additives and insecticides.
3. Thirdly, a comprehensive food and farm policy must find ways to curtail the destruction of the land in pursuit of coal.
4. A pervasive farm and food policy should review

current farming techniques especially as they apply to deep plowing and its effect on soil erosion.

5. A responsible farm and food policy must take into account a systems analysis estimating the overall consequences of each action, with particular concern for the life-giving power of soil and water.

6. A responsible and comprehensive food and farm policy must deal with issues regarding those who own the land.

7. A responsible farm and food policy should be concerned with issues of fairness for rural land and people, especially in regard to large agri-business interests controlling power.

8. A responsible food and farm policy must seek to restore economic balance between rural and urban America, perhaps through a.) variations on the parity concept, and b.) variations on land-use assessment for taxation purposes.

9. Whatever elements of a farm and food policy are developed, to be truly just, they should: a) be general in scope; b) be universal in application; c) be widely and understandably publicized; d) safeguard against special interests' powerful lobby; e) be able to stand on their own; f) and be subject to change only by authorized representative action.

10. A responsible farm and food policy, from a Christian perspective, should consider "meaningfulness and

integrity\* as cornerstones of policy decisions.

11. A comprehensive farm and food policy must make industrialization accountable for humanitarian and environmental concerns.

B. Exposition on Guidelines:

1. Rural and Farm People's Insight. Initially and overwhelmingly, any attempt at rural farm and food policy formulation must incorporate the insights of rural and farm people themselves. I base such a guideline upon Rolf Knierim's Old Testament insights into agricultural people's close association and respect for the land<sup>1</sup>, Dan Rhoades' "systems" analysis requirements,<sup>2</sup> John Rawls' ethical concept of fairness in the area of social justice,<sup>3</sup> and the following insight of Ian Barbour which takes into account a scepticism of non-rural and non-farm pro-food-industrial profit oriented vested interests:

The profits of the market place are an inadequate mechanism for the control of technological innovation. New decision-making procedures for technological assessment within the federal government are proposed, in which social consequences are thoroughly studied in advance;

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<sup>1</sup> Rolf Knierim, "Spirituality in the Old Testament," unpublished paper presented in class by the same title, School of Theology at Claremont, Fall 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Dan Rhoades, notes for the class "Ethical Dimension of Global Responsibility," School of Theology at Claremont, Fall 1975.

<sup>3</sup> John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971)

those groups most likely to be affected should be represented in the early stages of innovation before vested interests are strongly entrenched.<sup>4</sup>

Insights by the farmer and towns-people is called for! The farmer is in fact the one who traditionally can best spiritually assess humans' relationship with the ground from which food comes.<sup>5</sup> The Old Testament reveals that farming is the cultural norm for ancient people and that agriculture was the original "culture".<sup>6</sup> The farmer (who works on the land he owns) and other rural people give a balanced view to a discussion involving personnel from other fields and urban areas, helping to create an atmosphere in policy discussion which takes into account the systemic nature of any such policy decision.<sup>7</sup> Any decision which does not consider the farmer's voice is in fact not "fair", not only because their interest may not be considered, but also because according to our working definition of fairness<sup>8</sup> the farmer must be represented in any policy formulation process the end result of which will have consequences for him. So in the beginning, for at least the above broad reasons, any attempt at rural food and farm policy formulation must incorporate the insights of rural and farm people.

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<sup>4</sup>Ian G. Barbour, (ed.) Earth Might Be Fair (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>Knierim.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Rhoades.

<sup>8</sup>Rawls, p. 7.

2. Fossil Fuels. A comprehensive food and farm policy must take into account ways of reducing the dependence upon fossil-fuel based soil and crop additives and insecticides. Old Testament passages reveal that humans have an undeniable close link with the ground. It is from the ground that humans come, live, and to which upon death, return:

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. Genesis 2.7 (RSV)

He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits has no sense. Proverbs 12.11. (RSV)

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Genesis 3.19 (RSV)

What is important for this consideration is the obvious fact that we as humans live from the ground. Without the ground we would not be alive!

God empowers the ground with the ability to produce food. Genesis 2.9 is a good reference for this, "And out of the ground the Lord made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." Yet through our extensive misuse of fossil fuels for fertilizers and pesticides we are polluting the land and the water which flows through it rather than aiding it in God's original created order. Today "about 90% of all nitrogen fertilizers used in the United States are made from natural gas as an ingred-

ient."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, "about 90% of all pesticides are made from petroleum or other petrochemicals. Then more is used as dilutants and in application to crops."<sup>10</sup> At current rates of consumption our farming techniques use over 360 billion cubic feet of natural gas or 9 million tons of actual nitrogen a year plus at least 735 million gallons of petroleum per year.<sup>11</sup> Not only are these chemicals dangerous for human consumption, but I find they aid in compacting soils, with the help of heavy farm equipment driving across land which has had petroleum based fertilizers and insecticides applied to them, and which has been deep-plowed for dry-land farming.<sup>12</sup> E. F. Schumacher offers a creative alternative for thought and possible action.

Modern agriculture relies on applying to soils, plants, and animals ever-increasing quantities of chemical products, the long-term effect of which on soil fertility and health is subject to very grave doubts. People who raise such doubts are generally confronted with the assertion that the choice lies between "poison or hunger". There are highly successful farmers in many countries who obtain excellent yields without resort to such chemicals and without raising any doubts about long-term soil fertility and health. For the last twenty-five years, a private, voluntary organization, the Soil Association, has been engaged in exploring the vital relationships between soil, plant, animal, and man; has

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<sup>9</sup> "The U.S. Farm Energy Problem," Acres, U.S.A. (September 1976), 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> K. Ross Toole, The Rape of the Great Plains (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 135ff.

undertaken and assisted relevant research; and has attempted to keep the public informed about such developments in these fields. Neither the successful farmers nor the Soil Association have been able to attract official support or recognition. They have generally been dismissed as "the muck and mystery people," because they are obviously outside the mainstream of modern technological progress. Their methods bear the mark of non-violence and humility towards the infinitely subtle system of natural harmony, and this stands in opposition to the life-style of the modern world. But if we now realize that the modern life-style is putting us into mortal danger, we may find it in our hearts to support and even join these pioneers rather than to ignore or ridicule them.<sup>13</sup>

Needless to say, a comprehensive food and farm policy, at least for reasons of stewardship alone, must take into account ways of reducing our dependence upon fossil-fuel based soil and crop additives and insecticides.

3. Coal Pursuit. A comprehensive food and farm policy must find ways to curtail the destruction of the land in pursuit of coal. The current pursuit of energy independence by which the United States seeks to strip-mine for western coal is yet another way current inadequate policies are destroying the land and its God-given ability to produce food and sustain the lives of rural people. The Rape of the Great Plains, by K. Ross Toole, professor of Western History at the University of Montana, is an excellent portrayal of comprehensive destruction at the hands of coal and oil companies. Open pit strip mining for coal not only destroys

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<sup>13</sup>E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 158f.

the water table but also will require vast amounts of water both to irrigate the inappropriately described "reclaimed land" and to cool proposed coal-fired electrical plants which may be constructed near the mines in the Great Plains region itself. Without water land will blow away as Americans have already experienced in the infamous dust-bowl of the 1930's. The Great Plains region is a fragile area, often without adequate water supplies as it is. A comprehensive farm and food policy should therefore take into account the effects of strip-mining for coal at least for the reasons of potential soil and water loss.

4. Deep Plowing. A pervasive farm and food policy should review current farming techniques especially as they apply to deep plowing and its effect on soil erosion. In deep plowing the top soil often is turned to dust which is subject to both wind and water erosion.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the over-emphasis on grain production currently puts much new ground under the plow.

5. Systems Analysis. A responsible farm and food policy must take into account a systems analysis estimating the overall consequences of each action, with particular concern for the life-giving power of soil and water. In a broad sense, a responsible farm and food policy should be

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<sup>14</sup> Toole, pp. 135ff.

wary of any "technological fix"<sup>15</sup> which does not take into account the complexity of environmental and social systems in which all of created order has its being. I believe American society has become so entranced by each new technological evolution that it readily accepts technology itself as a panacea for all problems. The problem with technology is that it fails to recognize and is inept at dealing with the myriad of intertwining factors which comprise most situations. For example, with the current energy dilemma a "technological fix" would say, hypothetically, "Coal. Coal is the answer. Therefore let's tear up the Great Plains to get precious western coal so we can become less reliant on expensive and unreliable sources of foreign oil." As I have already shown and will continue to reveal, such an approach does not take into account water table destruction, noise pollution from the blasting of overburden, air pollution from sulphur by-products which result from burning coal to power the proposed electrical generating plants, huge water losses to steam when water must be used to cool the plants, water pollution from heat released into nearby streams and rivers killing fish and wildlife, and I shall show later, the rapid influx of people required to operate the huge projects, people who will move into rural towns

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<sup>15</sup>Rhoades.

harshly uprooting rural people's way of life and bringing with them numerous maladies of urban areas.<sup>16</sup> I believe it is only through responsible stewardship of the land and its people that rural America will realize the fullness of its God-given ability to produce food.

We now turn to issues of social justice which also must be considered by those pursuing a responsible food and farm policy.

6. Issues of Land Ownership. A responsible and comprehensive food and farm policy must deal with issues of land ownership! It is revealing to note that seven of the largest oil companies own over 62.2 million acres of land or approximately thirteen times the area of the State of New Jersey.<sup>17</sup> Three of the largest railroads own the surface and mineral rights to 4.5 times the area of the State of New Jersey.<sup>18</sup> The result of this absentee land ownership is often a disregard for stewardship except for the bare minimum requirements which will still yield the highest crop or mineral production bringing in the greatest profit. However, as outlined in guideline number one, often absentee

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<sup>16</sup> Toole.

<sup>17</sup> Campaign for Human Development, *Poverty in American Democracy* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), p. 145.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

land owners fail to allow the local people a representative voice in the boards which make policy affecting them. This is injustice, for it denies one's right in a free society to determine, responsibly, the course of one's life. Only where individuals and groups are duly represented, can the rules which are made by bodies be said to be just for those affected.<sup>19</sup> Absentee land ownership takes control of the land out of the hands of local people and puts it in the control of people often far away and unconcerned with rural farm family issues. Absentee land owners often reap the benefits of the land without discharging duties commensurate with such benefits.

7. Ethical Issues of Fairness. A responsible farm and food policy should be concerned with issues of fairness especially in regard to large agri-business interests and controlling power. Harvard University ethicist, John Rawls, outlines two broad points which describe the situation in which duties and benefits are assigned in a responsible and just society. First, each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second, social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and attached to

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<sup>19</sup>Rawls, p. 34.

positions and offices open to all.<sup>20</sup> The current situation of large agri-business in rural America is one of economic inequalities being doubly compounded in that those who work the hardest receive the smallest, and those agri-business entrepreneurs, away from the land, receive the greatest. Furthermore, small farm owners must compete in the same market place with their much larger agri-business colleagues. Compounding this unfair situation still more is the fact that positions and offices which reap the benefits of social and economic inequalities under this system are not open to all, but are in the hands of a few who sit on numerous controlling boards of the nations largest agri-business corporations and even within the United States Department of Agriculture.<sup>21</sup>

8. Urban and Rural Economic Balance. A responsible food and farm policy must seek to restore economic balance between rural and urban America, perhaps through 1) variations on the parity concept, and 2) variations on land-use assessment for taxation purposes. As a result of control wielded by giant corporations and urban oriented government (power lies in urban areas because that is from where the majority of the people and representatives come) many rural farm families are running out of money and are approaching

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.. p. 60.

<sup>21</sup>Campaign for Human Development.

or have entered bankruptcy.<sup>22</sup> Two particular ideas might be considered in the formulation of farm policy in this area. One is the idea of parity, in which the marketing trades purchase commodities for 100% of the production cost plus a reasonable profit for risk and work, enabling farmers to meet their daily living costs.<sup>23</sup> Farmers, consumers, and the trades should all be represented in determining what is a "reasonable profit for risk and work done" in order for Rawls' fairness principle to be observed. The second economic idea to be considered in farm policy formulation should deal with land-use assessment for taxation purposes. A tax system must take into account both the food-producing potential of certain land and the increasing rate of encroachment by urbanization into rural areas.

All across the country, rural land values and tax rates have been rising as urbanization moves out from the city to undeveloped areas. As this occurs, land increases in value over and above its farm use value because it can be used or has a potential for residential, commercial, and industrial purposes. Tax rates rise because the new residents of the rural-urban fringe demand schools, water and sewer systems, roads, police protection, and other public services that were previously unnecessary. Caught in the double crunch of paying taxes at a higher rate on land whose market value is rising, farmers and other owners of undeveloped land have sought to have their land assessed for farm use value rather than at its fair market value, which includes a substantial element of developmental value.

Most states now have differential assessment laws, yet a recent study by the University of Pennsylvania

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>"Push National Economic Stability Act," Acres, USA. (November 1976), 13.

shows that "acting alone, most laws do little more than delay for a few years the decision to sell the land or to develop it. Nonetheless, when combined with other affective land use mechanisms, differential assessment can contribute to successful long term preservation of open lands."<sup>24</sup>

9. Constraints. Whatever elements of a farm and food policy are developed, to be truly just, they should:

- a) be general in scope; b) universal in application; c) widely and understandably publicized; d) safeguard against special interest's powerful lobby; e) be able to stand on their own; f) and be subject to change only by authorized representative action. They should be general enough so that no particular people or institutions would benefit more than others. Secondly, they should be universal in application, holding for everyone, with no special interests reaping more of the benefits that they are due. Thirdly, they should be widely and understandably publicized so that all concerns can be aware of such decisions. Fourth, there should be some sort of ordering of conflicting claims for the purpose of appeal to guard against special interest's powerful lobby. And finally, these principles should stand as the final court of appeals in practical reasoning, subject only to change by duly representative councils.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Council on Environmental Quality, The Sixth Annual Report (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1975), pp. 675f.

<sup>25</sup> Rawls, p. 131-135.

10. "Meaningfulness" and Integrity. Since social justice involves the allocation of apportionate rights,<sup>26</sup> and since as Christians we believe Jesus Christ set a precedence for bringing meaning into people's lives, such as happened with the Disciples, Mary Magdalene, Zacharias and others, a responsible farm and food policy from a Christian perspective should consider "meaningfulness" and integrity as cornerstones of policy decisions. In other words, the result of policy should be such that, to the greatest extent possible, those individuals, families and groups affected feel that life is meaningful, that they have a voice in the decisions affecting their lives, and that the future will hold possibilities for personal enrichment with integrity.

11. Industrial Accountability. Industrialization must be made accountable for humanitarian and environmental concerns. If industrialization is allowed into rural regions, full environmental and social impact studies should be required within the farm and food policy so as to estimate both environmental and social consequences, and someone other than those affected by encroachment should be made to bear the costs for adjustments required in order to make industrialization acceptable to rural people and responsible

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

in environmental concerns. This is proposed in order to prevent additional instances such as occurred in Gillette, Wyoming, when the oil companies moved in. Writing in 1976, with a new threat imminent, K. Ross Toole describes Gillette:

In 1950 there were 2,191 people in Gillette. It was a typical cattle-farm town - - - stable, solid, balanced. By 1960 its population had jumped to 3,580 and by 1970 to 7,194 as a result of the oil boom. Within four years Gillette is expecting a second influx of 25,000 new residents; the coal boom. At present, 42% of Gillette's residents live in house trailers. Of 68 registered trailer parks within the city limits, only one meets federal standards, the only one with paved streets.

The city planner asserts that the city simply does not have the money to provide roads, paving, sewers, water, or schools.

In April 1974, James P. Sterba of the New York Times visited Gillette and expressed his shock. "It is a raw jumble of rutted streets and sprawling junkyards, red mud and dust, dirty trucks and crowded bars, faded billboards and sagging utility lines, and block after block of house trailers, squatting in the dirt like a nest of giant grubs..."

John S. Gilmore, senior economist at the Denver Research Institute, told a Senate subcommittee hearing recently, "At worst mobile home squatters form sprawling colonies often lacking water and sanitation. In some cases, families are forced to live in tents, even into the Wyoming winter."

As in most boom towns, prices in Gillette are high and the trailer people often feel that the local merchants are bilking them. There is a similar sentiment among the ranchers in the Gillette area and many of them, who for years traded in the city, are now going to Casper, Rapid City, or Sheridan...On the other hand, beleaguered merchants cannot expand because of the impossibly high price of land and construction costs and they greatly fear the advent of highly capitalized supermarkets, chain stores and restaurants--all from the "outside": There is almost universal contempt in Gillette for city administrators and their failure to zone or plan.

Gillette is clearly in trouble. The strains and tensions among the ranchers who trade there, the old-time Gillette residents, and the newcomers are obvious even to the cursory observer. To a remarkable degree

specific complaints, accusations, and jealousies lead circuitously to a pervasive sense of uncertainty.<sup>27</sup>

Humanitarian concerns must rank high in all rural policy considerations or what happened in Gillette, Wyoming, may be a common phenomenon throughout rural America as coal companies or other large profit-making companies move in.

C. Summary:

United States farm and food policy formulation should be guided by an understanding of human's close link to the food producing ability of the ground, and their responsibility to protect the ground so it may continue to produce the food of life. Consequently, agriculture, as the basic mode of human existence since ancient times, would be protected as a meaningful life-style for small farm families. Policy decisions would also take into account environmental and social systems impact and should require comprehensive forecasts of proposed policy effects upon all aspects of society. For example, what will be the environmental and social effect of open pit coal mining, petroleum based chemical applications to soils, bringing marginal land into full production, a situation which discourages youth from entering farming? To be fair, policy-making boards should be representative of various interests with their resulting decisions

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<sup>27</sup> Toole, pp. 95-98.

neither smothering the individual's rights nor denying society its rights. A balance must be struck, with protection of the land and of rural people and their farms and communities high on the list of priorities. It is to these overarching guidelines that United States farm and food policy should be responsible.

## Chapter 5

### STRATEGY FOR MINISTRY IN RURAL AMERICA: EVANGELISM BASED ON CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE, PROBLEM ANALYSIS, POLICY FORMATION, AND ACTION

"For the son of man is to come to save that which was lost."  
(Matt. 18.11) RSV

The task of Evangelism is to get people to "accept God with his mission in the world."<sup>1</sup> "Social justice, personal salvation, cultural affirmation, and church growth are all integral parts of God's saving acts."<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally evangelism is seen as spreading the message of personal salvation. Certainly this is in fact part of evangelism's task. And evangelism is needed in rural America today as much as ever.

#### A. The Message of Personal Salvation:

1. Peace through Jesus Christ. The message of personal salvation is essentially the same one that comes down over the ages, that in the man, Jesus of Nazareth, we find God on earth, coming into contemporary life through the power of the Holy Spirit, filling us with peace. Rural Amer-

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<sup>1</sup>Mortimer Arias. (Statement made in informal discussion in C. Dean Freudenberger's class on The World Council of Churches, School of Theology at Claremont, 1976.)

<sup>2</sup>Mortimer Arias, in Breaking Barriers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 17.

ican's personal lives stand in need of this message. The overwhelming effects of death, divorce, inferiority-complexes, insecurity, alienation, despair, alcoholism, unemployment, and so many more negative aspects actively serve to undermine many rural people's lives, often void of a firm foundation upon which to place their lives and their hopes.

On the other hand, those who cause others to be hurt also stand in need of salvation. In our complex society these are the people who, knowingly or unknowingly, support institutional policies which subject others to various forces which undermine their right to fullness of life. The evangelist's message is one of personal salvation for all, regardless of geographical location or vocational description. It is the message of peace which comes into our lives as a gift from God. It is as much a psychological peace as it is a physical peace. It is personal, touching each person in its own unique way, bringing wholeness to a broken spirit.

2. Social Dimensions. However, "Evangelism is not only individual salvation, but also has social and cosmic dimensions."<sup>3</sup> When discussing strategy for Christian ministry one must see social witness as an evangelistic voice of the Church, calling people to know Christ as Lord and Savior and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The rural

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

church has a great amount at stake in contemporary society. The rural church's neighbor is the same as the urbanite's... the prisoner, the hungry, the sick, the lonely...and I would add, the land, the farmer, the children and the children's children...the future of the human race. What role does the rural church play in the love of neighbor? And, how does this coincide with evangelism? These are key questions expressing the completeness of the Christian experience in the context of the rural church.

True evangelism in the rural church and the world today includes:

- The agonizing search for the meaning of "Salvation Today" and the affirmation that the sufferings and struggles of the people for humanization and liberation are not foreign to God's purpose for his world and the total process of salvation history;
- The constant effort to relate church to society, and to deepen our understanding of the implications of new developments in science and technology for the life of mankind on earth;
- The concern to respond to the terrible and apocalyptic spectre of hunger which hangs over most of our planet.<sup>4</sup>

3. Evangelism in Rural America. In what ways does evangelism in the rural church involve the above? Bishop James Armstrong has written, "Salvation cannot be grasped and smothered by the individual alone. It must be offered and applied to the larger, fragmented world of which he is a part."<sup>5</sup> This goes hand in hand with the scripture that one

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>James Armstrong, Mission--Middle America (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 26.

can find one's life only as one loses it in service for others, for the Lord's sake (Matt. 16:25). Furthermore, the individual to be evangelized, whether in the urban or rural setting must hear the gospel message in terms of daily concern, "drugs, poor housing, inadequate incomes, divorce and separation, death and alcoholism",<sup>6</sup> land use, natural resources, seasons and regeneration. It is these very settings and issues which are threatening rural society. Hence, this setting becomes not only one for evangelism in a focused internal sense, but also for the very fullness of salvation encompassing the internal with the social. Armstrong writes,

There is no legitimate way for the Christian to extract the individual from his surroundings. To try to convert individuals while assuming no responsibility for the laws that shape their lives and the systems that govern and limit their destinies is to repeat an all-too-familiar and comfortable heresy and to betray the gospel of our Lord...The full gospel knows both depth and outreach. It is experienced and applied. It is dependent upon reflection and prayer and is on intimate terms with misunderstanding, hardship, and conflict. It relates to every aspect of life.<sup>7</sup>

Let me not belabor the point. Calling persons to Christ through conversion means calling persons out of their worldly context of power, pleasure, profit motive and alienation in a land of soil destruction, personal deterioration and hunger, into the Christian context of a world filled

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rhea, "The Rural Challenge," Disciple, III, 10 (May 16, 1976), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, pp. 41-42.

with pain and a rural America beset by destruction of land and people, but with hope for all. Evangelism, then, is the church's effort to call people to Christ, a Christ who identifies with exploited creation--the land and people of God--and who fills us with strength and hope for the task of serving him to alleviate the exploitive practices and motives, for example, of farmers forced into land rape by market structures, consumer demands and public policy. "In all our churches, we have failed in the past in not preaching an integral gospel."<sup>8</sup> This can no longer be the case if we are to offer the holistic salvation message. "Because it concerns a whole message, evangelism includes announcement, prophetic denouncement, personal and community witness, the call to repentance, to conversion and to incorporation in the Christian Church, and its participation in the struggle for a more just and humane life, inspired in the purpose of God."<sup>9</sup> Let us remember, however, that salvation can never be reduced only to social and political dimensions, keeping in mind also that it cannot be limited to private and eternal dimensions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Samuel Carter, "Response to Bishop Arias's Address" (speech presented at the World Council of Churches Meeting, Nairobi, Kenya, November, 1975).

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Breaking Barriers, "Section One Report PD37", p. 45.

B. Strategy for Social Evangelism:

The strategy which I will try to develop for both evangelism and social witness (which are rightfully seen as one and which I will hence-forth call "social evangelism") involves C. Dean Freudenberger's fourfold strategy of perspective, problem analysis, policy formation, and action, all of which are yet not fully developed especially for the rural church. In the pages to follow I will suggest this fourfold strategy as viable for the rural church.

1. Christian Perspective. The church must provide a Christian perspective on social and personal issues. This perspective should begin where the Bible begins, with Christ. Without a Christian perspective on personal and social issues the end result of all action will inevitably be less than Christian. Who is this "Christ" who gives us a Christian perspective today? Christ is the one who brings God's justice and forgiveness into the commonplace of everyday life. Christ is the one who deals justly and forgivingly with humans. Christ is the one who offers a way of life which differs profoundly from our bent to materialism, misguided power, and misused profits. He offers hope to the rejected and judgement to those who destroy others' lives. When we do not know Christ, then our lives are often only selfishly motivated and our action is concerned primarily with our own welfare. The result is often, real emptiness.

For a Christian perspective on the land use problem and the personal effect it has I refer you back to Chapters 2 and 3. The perspective phase further involves both traditional insight and what Paulo Freire and other Latin Americans refer to as "concientizacion",<sup>11</sup> or becoming familiar with the knowledge and "awareness" of the subject. Perspective may also be offered through preaching especially as the preacher speaks to the whole inner person in the context of his or her whole outer world. Working with the Holy Spirit the preaching and teaching ministries of the church can provide a Christian perspective on current events and prepare the climate for conversion.

2. Problem Analysis. This phase of the strategy involves scrutinizing the personal and social problem from the perspective established, i.e., Christian. For problem analysis, the perspective from which one analyzes determines the result of analyzing. The sociological data remains the same, but the type of data sought and the conclusions drawn become different. If our perspective is profit oriented for example, our analysis of the problem will be in terms of economy. If, however, our perspective is Christian our analysis of the problem will be in terms of God's creation and redemption and humanity's place therein. Therefore, human

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<sup>11</sup>Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder, 1970)

needs rank high as goals. In chapter 3 I dealt with a more detailed account of problem analysis from Biblical and ethical resources as they relate to humans and the land.

A Christian perspective on an issue will result in a problem analyzed in Christian terms. The outcome of analysis then leads to specific policy formation and implementation.

3. Policy Formation. This phase of the strategy for social evangelism involves both the perspective phase and problem analysis phase. Policy formation becomes a way to move from the existing situation toward the Christian goals. Only after dealing with the former (perspectives and analysis) can one move into policy formation as it relates to the socio-political dimension of salvation. Because the land-use environmental and social problems are ones of a highly political nature, the goal of the strategy will be actual policy formation, in this case utilizing the elements discussed in Chapter 4 as formulation guidelines. Assuming that one has experienced Christ in the initial stages of conversion this strategy provides a way of carrying the converted life to its full social fulfillment, that is, being a co-creator with God in the establishment of the Kingdom on earth.

Confessing Christ and being converted to his discipleship belong inseparably together. Those who confess Jesus Christ deny themselves, their selfishness and slavery to the godless "principalities and powers",

take up their crosses and follow him.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Hough of the School of Theology at Claremont says that team building is a must before any project can begin. Christians must ask, "Who are we? How do we feel about each other?" Feelings, ideas, and opinions must be brought out in the open so individuals can work together as a community. Also, Hough believes family involvement is necessary in any project.<sup>13</sup> This certainly reflects a Christian perspective of humans in community (see Chapter 3) to the extent to which the nuclear family in the church seeks to join others in solidarity with the world at large.

Once the community of believers becomes active in any form (individuals united across broad geographical areas, a family unit, families and individuals together, etc.) policy formation can begin. Perspective offers a basis for policy. Problem Analysis offers an understanding of the issues to be addressed. Now comes the policy formation itself.

Policy formation is one of the most difficult yet most creative aspects of this process. How does an individual or a group decide what to put in a particular policy? An excellent place for the local church to begin deciding

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<sup>12</sup> Breaking Barriers, p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph C. Hough, Statement made in Colloquim Class School of Theology at Claremont, Spring 1976.

policy for itself is to check with its national boards and agencies to see whether they have pursued like issues. Often they can supply policy proposals or can lead the local church to other resources. On current issues of vital importance, the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches often have conducted or are conducting studies and should be willing to share whatever they have. Often, however, if the local church is really on the frontier of an issue it will have to research material on its own. Depending upon the scope of an issue, the local, regional, county, state or national libraries may be consulted. As a general rule, all public services from school districts to agriculture extension agencies to the county clerk have documents which are normally open for public viewing and which provide a wealth of information. Also, a sound social, political or economic theory is necessary. It is important to understand which changes will probably produce which results.

Following research comes much prayer, Bible study, and discussions among Christians to discern what a particular policy may entail from Christian perspectives. Such perspectives will certainly keep in mind the welfare of human beings, their freedom, self-sufficiency, and inclusiveness in society as children of God.

Policy formation, as I have shown, is no easy matter. It involves many hours of arduous, patient research to pro-

vide perspective, do analysis, and formulate policy. It involves no less than dying to oneself as one becomes open to the infinite possibilities of God in the practical realm of every-day life.

4. Action. With an emphasis upon superordinate goals such as the right to life, food, clothing, shelter, happiness, etc., upon which all people can agree,<sup>14</sup> or such as "The Common Good": "A world in which all people have access to the basic necessities of life, are self-determined, and judge and assess the renewable carrying capacity of the earth,"<sup>15</sup> the first step is a) to pay attention to places or power structures where crucial decisions are being made<sup>16</sup> which affect varying degrees of these superordinate goals: free, productive, enhancing life; quality, healthy food; attractive and pragmatic clothing; warm, pleasant shelter; and constructive happiness; or, the common good.

Following is a list of such places and power structures where important decisions are made concerning rural

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<sup>14</sup> Harvey Seifert, "Behavioral Research and Ministerial Communication," (an unpublished hand-out for a class School of Theology at Claremont, 1976)

<sup>15</sup> C. Dean Freudenberger (class lecture notes School of Theology at Claremont, 1976)

<sup>16</sup> Harvey Seifert, "Realistic Strategies in Power Relationships", (paper distributed in class School of Theology at Claremont, 1976)

America and therefor where attention should be paid:

Schools: local school boards, school board elections, student council meetings, faculty curriculum meetings, individual faculty members, college trustees, etc.

Corporations: board meetings, agri-business leaders in local community and beyond, others in community who have positions of "power", etc.

Political parties: local, district, county, state, national, candidate forums, caucusses, nominating and platform committees, etc.

Governments: local, county, state, national, legislative, executive, judicial, agencies, boards, etc.

Commodity Market: Spokane, Seattle, Portland, Boise, Chicago, San Francisco, etc.

Church: boards, committees, agencies, Council on Ministries, Trustees, Finance Committees, Administrative Boards, opinion leaders, Nominating Committee, Pulpit, minister, etc.

Media: television producers, radio producers, newspaper editors, magazine editors, etc.

Personal lives: eating habits, likes, dislikes, decisions determining one's outlook and action in all of life, etc.

Farmers: crops to raise, methods, etc.

b) Following an awareness of where decisions are made, the second step of action is to influence decisions where they are made. Again this keeps in mind the psychological norm that involvement aids in the converting process. Furthermore, from a theological holistic anthropology it is sound to involve the whole person, not just the person's mind. Hence, witness by doing! Letters to, discussions with, positive voting in areas of, supporting the victims of, and applying pressure on all those groups and individuals mentioned in step "a" above is a primary mode of policy formation and of evangelism. People in power must sense a public mood to which they will surely respond, if

not from personal beliefs then at least for political reasons. Personally, each individual can begin to study the facts of issues and the Christian perspectives on such issues moving on to creating a personal lifestyle in response to what one intellectually discovers.

C. Witnessing For Christ:

Finally, as a third step, individuals can become witnesses of Christ. They can be witnesses of Christ by becoming involved in the issues in which Christ would be involved, and by doing Christ's will. They can be witnesses for Christ by proclaiming his name and declaring that it is Christ who moves them to such action. The social action the individual performs in the converting process is in a sense witnessing "justice" for Christ. The individual becomes a witness for Christ, sharing with others why he or she does what he or she does. This can be accomplished by inviting others to one's church where the holistic salvation message is preached, taught, and acted upon. People can encourage others to join the church, to accept the Christian way of salvation for the whole person in the whole world--emotional, physical, environmental: Spiritual. By committing themselves to the church, people, in a sense, freeze the change in their own spiritual lives. Personal activity in policy formation as a loving response to God's initial love of self is one dramatic "place" where God calls his people and in which God works out his salvation for all

people, Christian and non-Christian alike, in our time.

With social-evangelism as a strategy for ministry in rural America I believe the church is on its way, working with God to establish wholeness and therefore meaningful and productive life in rural areas. Surely such wholeness will guard against parochialism and provide for integrity in global responsibility in today's world.

## Chapter 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### A. Summary:

Policies such as Project Independence whereby the United States becomes independent of foreign petroleum supplies and the all systems go approach to grain production for the purpose of making a profit on the world food shortage are closely related to problems in rural America. Besides land being lost to coal strip mining practices and wind and water erosion due to excessive plowing and other types of soil destruction; chemical pollutants, high taxes and high operational costs are increasingly forcing an unhealthy situation among farm families, agricultural towns, and all who rely on rural America for their livelihood, which indirectly involves all Americans. Land ownership increasingly falls into the hands of relatively few large corporations. Coal and oil booms are bringing a large population influx into rural towns unprepared to deal with rapidly growing populations. And social problems due to the newly volatile life abound. People become trapped by economics and by governmental and business bureaucracies. Within the midst of all these problems stands the church, largely unprepared to deal with structures that cause the problems and with people affected by the problems. I believe that the problems are overarching ones of governmental policy which

seem to favor power and profit above humanitarian and ecological concerns.

Although there are international pressures for U.S. grain production, the bottom line for the United States is this: Because there is a market for grain in a starving world, a market in which the U.S. stands to make a profit, it has put too much new land into grain production. In the end, the U.S. apparently has put so much new land under the plow that a new dust bowl is highly likely.

Furthermore, the U.S. form of highly energy inefficient farming is causing excessive amounts of petroleum to be used in operating farm machinery and in chemical sprays and fertilizers which add harmful pollutants to the biosphere. In order to fuel this form of agriculture the U.S. must now tear up the northern Great Plains to get coal for factories and electrical power plants so that oil can be diverted to farming. In its pursuit of coal America may be turning the Great Plains into a waste land.

People's lives are often harmed in the process. They often must fight off governmental and big business take-over of their land. Pollutants in the air, water, and food increasingly make living physically unhealthy. A new wave of poverty is sweeping across the land. Too many people apparently believe that more technology is the answer to our problems. This solution obviously is destroying rural America.

The problems fall into at least two categories, eco-justice and social justice. Eco-justice problems are those essentially of pollution, land destruction and erosion. Social justice problems are those of big business land take-over, inadequate market operation, population increases where coal and oil booms come to small towns, and insufficient ethical and spiritual resources with which to deal with the problem.

Biblical and ethical resources are available to provide the church with a foundation from which to move on the problems confronting rural America. Issues of stewardship, justice, and holistic salvation are at stake. In this project I have shown how various Old Testament passages point to the human's close relationship with God, a relationship in which God continues to function on a very basic level through empowering the ground with the ability to produce food. Humans, on their side of the relationship, grow in their knowledge and love of God as they do God's work, caring for the land and doing that which enhances community. The Old Testament is rather clear in its ethical view that salvation comes in following God's will...in the doing of God's commandments. To be fully alive humans must do God's will, for they are created by and dependent upon God for their very lives.

Stewardship through care of the land becomes a very common and necessary way for humans to live out their lives

before God. Through caring for the ground they prepare it for God's act of creating crops for harvest and hence for food, the fuel of life.

Not only does God speak to humans, in nature, through providing food, but God also addresses humans through nature's beauty, inspiring within humans wonder, awe, appreciation and humility in response to natural phenomena. Ian Barbour and others even express the belief that nature has intrinsic rights of its own, quite apart from an instrument for human purposes.<sup>1</sup> Creation is a delight to God. What the Old Testament and contemporary resources offer is that in the predominant concern for food production and energy independence humans have neglected their overall responsibility for the beauty of the land, its permanence for future generations, and its life-enhancing potential for those currently working on and near the land. I have shown that the U.S. generally understands food production and energy independence as two isolated problems to be tackled while failing to recognize the effect of its action on the larger social and ecological systems of which these problems are only a part. People, the total environment, our economic system, government policies and on and on...all must be considered if America is to deal responsibly with God's earth and people. As part of a larger system, all things require

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<sup>1</sup> Ian G. Barbour (ed.) Earth Might Be Fair (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 6.

relationship with the system or they will die for lack of things the larger system provides. If selfish energy and farm policies continue America will probably over-feed itself, leach the land of soil, water and valuable minerals necessary for crop production, and burn itself out through energy over-consumption.

The Church as the body of Christ must do its part in addressing these problems. As I view the situation, the Church's task is twofold. On the one hand it must provide a Christian and ethical perspective for policy proposals which affect the overarching structures which govern rural America. Among the guidelines for such policy proposals are concerns for fairness, equal opportunities, and equitable division of rights and duties. On the other hand it must bring the Christian salvation message to the people in and of rural America, challenging them to do God's will, and offering them hope for new life.

In policy proposal sessions, I have offered that farmers and rural people should be involved, for they are closest to and most understanding of the land, and the policies, in their final form, should take into account responsible care for the land. This will inevitably mean that policies will show a decline in reliance upon petroleum-based chemicals and otherwise energy intensive farming methods. Likewise they would reflect concern for farm families who live on the land through providing incentives for them

to continue their work. Such policies will also reflect cut-backs in fossil fuel exploration which destroys lands as I have shown, and development of less destructive energy sources such as wind, solar, and geo-thermal. New policies should take greater account of systems theory and systems analysis in order to evaluate the larger far-reaching effects of proposed policies on the land and its people. Issues of absentee land ownership, which take control of the land away from local people, should be dealt with. Something should also be done to restore economic balance between rural and urban America: Under the current situation giant urban-based corporations often reap the profits while rural farmers and communities are going bankrupt. The concept of parity for farmer remuneration becomes an attractive one, if farmer production is not extravagant or wasted, and should be investigated more fully. Finally, each policy proposal should bear up under questions of their ability to enhance "meaningfulness" in people's lives. Do policies detract or add to the creation of meaningful, purposeful, and quality living?

The Church has a role to play in policy proposals for it offers perspectives of justice and stewardship with which few other institutions are concerned.

I have proposed a strategy for ministry in rural America which includes evangelism as a cornerstone in bringing a Christian perspective to bear on personal, social and environmental issues. The evangelist's message is one of

both personal salvation, and social and ecological justice; for one only truly finds one's life when one loses it in Christ's service for others. Today the "other" who cries out for salvation is a starving world, a deteriorating American farm and rural landscape, and policies tending to destroy both land and people. The Church's task in tackling these problems, in bringing Christ's fullness of life to people and land, involves its describing the problems from Christian perspectives, analyzing the problems in light of Biblical and ethical sources, providing guidelines for policy proposals which will deal with the problems, becoming involved in the decision-making processes which create policies, and finally, active involvement in living by the new policies. In all these ways people can grow to know God and God's holistic salvation for their lives as they become witnesses, bearing Christ in today's society.

B. Conclusion:

Based upon my study, it appears that, in rural America, its people, land, and the policies which govern it are in disarray. Christians are called upon to respond, and in so responding the Church will discover that policies must become more socially and ecologically just, and the Christian salvation message must be proclaimed within this concept if people and land are to survive in quality and dignity. The Church should be lifting up the Christian vision of stewardship in resource use and justice in social relationships.

The Church should be making closer evaluation of agricultural practices which convert fossil fuels to food energy at very imbalanced ratios.<sup>2</sup> The Church should be lifting up the science of agriculture which fundamentally is that of "combining the energies of the sun, chemistry of the soil, the vegetation that covers and protects the soil, with live-stock that can convert vegetation cover, for the sustenance of human life in community."<sup>3</sup> Christians should learn to articulate a responsible vision which comes from faith perspectives and understanding about justice, stewardship, love and a kingdom of God on earth. "The role of the church is to help persons and communities make local and national decisions in global perspectives."<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, "the church is called upon to empower its people to persevere"<sup>5</sup> in tasks presented.

It is a great and vitally important task to which the church is called and for which it can minister in ways that I have shown, including evangelism, policy guideline proposals, and policy implementation.

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<sup>2</sup>C. Dean Freudenberger, "Towards United States Food and Farm Policy in Global Context of an Impoverished Humanity and a Threatened Biosphere," (an unpublished Key-note address delivered to the United Methodist "Grainbelt Consultation," Overland Park, Kansas, December 1, 1976), p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

**APPENDIX**

"God's Gift: Your Life and the Farm",  
(an original sermon)

Today I want to talk about the farm and our lives as gifts from God. I remember with warm affection my father's stories of his growing up on the farm near Dayton, Washington. I was always impressed with his regard for his boyhood experiences at harvest. These recollections provided for me a warm relationship to the land that I really never had growing up in town.

Today I feel that so many of us have become so separated from the land which grows our food that we really do not understand this remarkable instrument God uses for our benefit. Even if we live or work on the farm, we have allowed others to make decisions which affect not only the land and the food it produces but also our very lives and the lives of future generations. We who rely on the land for our food and water, and some of us for our jobs, are gradually letting food and farm policies be formed by people who are at a great distance from the land and from us.

I am becoming convinced that numerous facets of agriculture have become solely for profit, and not for food and community. In many cases huge corporations who have no regard for people control much of the food industry, from production to marketing, edging the local farmer and merchant out of business. Agriculture has become an industry for profit and power. Our farm families and farming communities

are threatened with financial, ecological, psychological and personal destruction. City people and government bureaucrats are calling the shots. Many of us do not understand our Biblical foundations for such a concern. We are unprepared to wage the battle. We have forgotten the farm while we take it for granted.

My life is a case in point of one who left the farming community because it offered little in the way of a meaningful future. My education system taught me to stay away from agriculture and concentrate on academic concerns. Farming offered me no stability and as I saw it society viewed farming with very little respect. Excitement, power, interesting people, money...all, I was subtly taught, could be found in the city. To even be involved with petty farming and small town concerns meant that I would be a failure.

The effect in my life was such that I went to the city to college and hoped to gain fame through a profession in the city. I learned nothing of land and water preservation. Only slowly did the environmentalists' message begin to sink in for me. They were concerned not only with the land but with the people and with future people on earth. I realized how blind I had been.

In denying concerns of the farm we deny God a valuable instrument of speaking in our lives. By our failure to support policies and candidates which protect the land and enhance farming, we indirectly approve of those who destroy agriculture by turning it into an industry for power

and profit only. The result---an abundance of harmful chemical additives in foods. The result---excessive soil erosion in the Great Plains. The result---our own uneasiness about the food we eat, the lives we live, and the future world we offer our children and our childrens' children. By our negligent activity in political affairs which relate to agriculture, we are destroying the means by which God provides us nourishment for life.

II Peter 3.13 says, "What we await are new heavens and a new earth where, according to his promise, the justice of God will reside." (The New American Bible) Surely God's plan of justice includes a renewed interest in the land and the people who live from that land.

Isaiah is quite blunt about the development of our problems. In chapter 24, verse 5 he proclaims, "The earth is polluted because of its inhabitants, who have transgressed laws, violated statutes, broken the ancient covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants pay for their guilt" (TNAB). If we were to read the entire section surrounding this passage we would see that Isaiah is trying to tell the people of his time that deliverance can come only through people's complete transformation and their doing God's will in daily life. If people would only believe in God's way, if they would only rely on God, they could be saved. Isaiah is calling for the people to repent, to turn from their dangerous patterns and turn to obedience

to God.

Today, we are the ones at fault. We have denied the laws of God for community which say, "Get involved". We have violated the principles of a republic which call for informed people to vote and relay their feelings to their representatives. And we have broken our ancient covenant with God, that He will be our God and we will be his people, by making personal security, self-serving life-styles, and self-pity the objects of our loyalty.

I am as guilty as any. I was lured away from the farm. This has happened to so many people that big business is left to control the farm. The result---erosion, drought, and loss of financial and psychological stability are all coming to bear on much of our farm lands and communities and their people. We have failed to do our part in serving God's interest of justice in land use and food policies. By our neglect or misguided actions we have served to cause these problems. But the Bible, in II Peter and so many other places give us a message of hope.

What is the answer? What are we to do? Where do we go from here? What action really best serves God's interest for us? We must get the facts: but, facts alone mean little if we do not know how to act intelligently on them. Yet even all the information possible, and all the intellectual activity we could bring to bear on the issues mean little if we do not act faithfully. Let us not make the failure of

having good intentions, but doing what actually turns out to be wrong.

If we solely rely on our own rationality we stand to sin again. By now we have learned our lessons about pride and sin. Who are we to know the final answers? How do we guard against falling into the same old trap of doing what ultimately serves our own self-centered interests? This is the trap of sin---of so thinking and acting that we depend upon no one else, that we think we can make it on our own. Any high school biology student knows that an organism cannot sever its ties with its ecosystem without spelling its own death. The sin of false pride which leads to self-centered independence will certainly kill us if we fail to care for our farm lands and its people.

We sin because we really neither comprehend nor believe in the fullness of God's love for us manifest in the love of our neighbor. We sin further when we fail to accept the pure and unbounded love which God offers each individual, a love which is radically different from our own definition of love. We sin by calling our feeble efforts at loving, "God's love," when really we have done little to invest our lives in the lives of others, and in so doing really gaining our own life in return, in God's own way.

There is an interesting account in the Book of John, chapter 5, verse 6, in which Jesus goes down to the therapy pool at Bethesda. There he finds a man, lame for thirty-eight years, who can never quite reach the troubled waters

in time to be healed. Jesus asks what to us seems a ridiculous question, "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus seemed to know that God gives us power if we only will use it; if we only really want it. "Ask and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matt. 7.7, TNEB) A great part of the good news is that God freely gives us the things that we need if we will only seek after them. To the lame man Jesus simply says, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." The man believed, and he walked.

Jesus asks the same question of us. Do we really want to be healed? Do we really want to have an adequate diet for all people? Do we really want clean food, land, water, and air in our farming lands and cities? Do we really want America's communities to regain the wholesome nature they once had? Do we, in our own personal lives, want to be healed?

If we do want to be healed, if we want to open ourselves to God's love, unbounded and pure, then we must rise, take up our own pallets, and walk. We must prepare to walk a difficult political and economical road which will lead to stability among farm families and rural communities. We must support tax reforms which favor small farms. We must support farming practices which are less reliant on excessive use of pollutants. We must be willing to give, that in the long run we will receive...better food, a healthier en-

vironment, and a future land for our children to come.

To be healed on the ecological front means that we can clean up the silt which flows in our rivers. It means that we can clean up the air...removing the dust and other pollutants. Clean farming practices exist, even for large-scale production, if we will only demand them. To be healed ecologically excites me because it may be an answer to many physical illnesses.

Investing our lives in God's service for the land and its people means that we will experience a sense of healing which will bring purpose and security back into our rural lands. Youth will want to remain on the land. Small businesses in our towns will be revitalized. And we will be able to grow enough clean food to feed our own people as well as offer substantial assistance to the world's mal-nourished.

Investing our lives in God's service to the land and its people means healing in our own personal lives. Accepting God's love into our lives comes not in empty phrases uttered while on our knees. Accepting God into our lives comes when we believe strongly enough that we will live by our belief. It is then that we truly accept God, receiving his Spirit into our hearts. "None of those who cry, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly father" (Matt. 7.21 TNEB). God's salvation is freely offered. We need only accept and do.

I am excited about this mode of accepting God's love. I am optimistic about the positive changes that can come to our market structure, our small farming communities, and our own health and new-found faith.

I realize that this call to faithful living comes as a confrontation. Will I have the stamina to regularly write my elected officials, to let my concerns be heard, to speak out for God, and to make the necessary cutbacks in my own personal life-style? With this question of my own willingness to participate comes my pessimism over whether we really can create a new order. Can we really raise an adequate supply of food without destroying the land: Can farming really become a viable life-style for our youth to pursue? Will we ever rid our land of unhealthy pollutants? When I see that all these issues are related my pessimism really grows.

Fortunately, God speaks to us a strong word of hope. Through Isaiah, God speaks these words, "My chosen ones shall long enjoy the produce of their hands. They shall not toil in vain, nor beget children for sudden destruction." (65.22-23 TNEB) And in the New Testament we find the most hopeful news of all in Christ's resurrection from the dead. From the very worst can come the very best. Even from the very serious situation in which we now find ourselves we can realize a new and better way. With God, as Paul says, all things are possible.

Now the decision is ours. Do we want to invest our-

selves in the transforming power of God's love? Do we want to be healed? If we do, then Jesus speaks to us, "Take up your lives, in dignity, with concerns for rural America on your shoulders, and walk!" (My own paraphrase.)

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